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Singaporean Social Science Journals: Creating a Regional Voice or Scrambling to Reach the Top?

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Abstract

Given its newfound position as a solid member of the global semi-periphery, has social science in Singapore been able to develop alternatives to academic dependency on the West? To answer this question, I focus on one segment of Singapore's social science infrastructure, journal editors. In the interviews with these individuals, it becomes clear that there is an awareness of a division between journals published in the West and those from other parts of the world. However, in terms of wholeheartedly working towards developing regional alternatives, there appears a more contradictory pattern of reactions. The majority of editors are keen to develop regional perspectives or voices in their journals but they are equally keen to compete with North American and European journals on their own terms. A significant minority, however, are focused squarely on that world to the near exclusion of other concerns. In the final part of the article, I argue that the views of Singapore's journal editors closely reflects the adoption of what Bourdieu describes as a "succession strategy" in the playing of the social science game. The result is a missed opportunity at applying some form of delinking strategy as recommended by Samir Amin in situations of dependency, be they economic or intellectual.

Keywords

Singapore, social science, academic dependency, scholarly publishing, scholarly journals

Introduction

Since its independence in 1965 Singapore has experienced consistently high levels of economic growth. It is considered one of the four newly industrialised countries of East Asia, along with Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea. With a gross national income per capita of US\$ 49,950, Singapore now stands among the richest countries on the planet (World Bank, 2009). Given Singapore's success in catching up to the West in economic terms, it is a legitimate question to ask how it has performed in other areas of human activity. This article examines a key component of Singapore's intellectual infrastructure, namely its social science journals, and asks whether the country's newfound economic status has resulted in editorial strategies that sympathise with the

aim of creating a regional role for Singaporean social science or whether the aim has been to look farther afield, at North America and Europe, for inspiration. More specifically, it uses the concept of academic dependency to ask, firstly, whether editors are aware of differences between their own status as producers of social science and the status of producers located in the West. And secondly, if they are aware of a difference, what are their reactions to it?

Semi-structured interviews conducted with 13 editors of social science journals based in Singapore over the course of 2008 found that the majority are aware of the core-periphery divide and believe that it makes doing social science from the periphery more difficult. Reaction to this situation, however, varies. The majority is concerned over the need of the region to have a voice in international social science and this translates into attempts at helping regional authors become published. On the other hand, some are also keen players of the international social science game as it is currently structured by the core. For these editors, climbing to the top of a particular discipline's journal 'league table' is important. These two goals create paradoxes in the discourse of the editors. Finally, there are a number of editors who are not concerned with the split between core and periphery. Either their journal has 'broken out' and achieved international recognition already, they feel confident that it will do so soon, or they are content with a regional presence.

Review of the Literature

The notion of academic or intellectual dependency is an offshoot of the wider concept of economic dependency elaborated by such individuals as Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Celso Furtado and Samir Amin in the 1960s and 1970s (Frank, 1969; Furtado, 1969; Amin, 1976; Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). Although quite varied in their underlying details, the one distinctive common characteristic the various approaches to dependency theory share is a perspective that views the internal structure of certain nations as determined in large part by external forces, usually of stronger nations (Larrain, 1989:112). Dependency theory, therefore, always postulates some form of hierarchy with strong states (the core) dominating weaker ones (the periphery) either absolutely or relatively. Initially, dependency theory was developed to explain the stagnant or distorted economies of Latin America. Later it became a key element of neo-Marxist analysis of the so-called Third World with its two-tier system increasingly augmented by a third, the notion of the semi-periphery combining elements of both (Wallerstein, 1979). However, as well as spreading geographically and developing concep-

tually, dependency theory was also increasingly used to understand non-economic areas of social existence.

Our interest in dependency theory stems from its application to one of these areas, the world of the academy. Philip Altbach was one of the first scholars to develop a dependency approach to intellectual work. In an influential article published in 1975 and later reprinted, he examined the position of the publishing industry in the developing world. Altbach defended three key assumptions in his work. Firstly, that intellectual output (books, journals and so on) were unequally distributed around the world for historical and economic reasons. In particular, developed countries produced more than the developing world. Secondly, that industrialised countries benefited from this inequality and, in fact, on occasion used their superiority to disadvantage the developing world. And thirdly, that economic, scientific and cultural development depends on the 'intellectual productivity' of the nation. In these assumptions, one can clearly see the dependency perspective at work; namely, a hierarchical structure of intellectual production in which those at the top dominate those at the bottom to their overall disadvantage. For Altbach, this unequal structure is underpinned by issues of copyright, low levels of literacy, the imposition of colonial languages and institutional norms, lack of economic resources and the dominant use of concepts and theoretical frameworks developed to explain developments in the West (Altbach, 1976).

Writing in the early 1990s, Frederick Garneau also viewed the developing countries as being dominated by the developed world in social science. A major difference between the two, however, was Garneau's elaboration of an explanatory model for why the system behaves in the way it does. Employing a political economy perspective wedded to world system analysis, Garneau argued that the knowledge industry, of which social science was one part, was a business much like any other in that its management attempted to secure the lowest possible per unit costs in a situation requiring a high level of capitalisation (libraries, publishing systems, computer facilities and so on). This creates an incentive to expand into parts of the world having less well capitalised knowledge infrastructures. At the same time, the need for capitalisation puts social science at the mercy of local political elites who, through their control of budgets help shape its agenda to fit their own ideological needs. The social science which results is, therefore, unlikely to reflect the situation of the countries to which it is exported. However, it may serve the interests of elite groups in the receiving country who are in alliance with the core elite. It also produces relations of dependency as vertical (hierarchical) relations are created between institutions and scholars in centre and periphery. These relations are exacerbated over time by the ever-increasing knowledge that is gradually built up in

core areas from the “raw data and information from many peripheral sources” (Garneau, 1991:60).

At roughly the same time as Garneau published his work, Dan Chekki, produced his own comparative study of social science in the United States, India and Canada. Like the others, his basic premise reflects the dependency approach: “American sociology has made a significant impact on the sociologies of India and Canada during the post-World War II period. Conversely, Indian and Canadian sociologies have not influenced American sociology” (Chekki, 1987:3). This, according to Chekki, has created “...dependency and inhibit[s] the development of theories and models of society appropriate to the social context” (Chekki, 1987:9). However, Chekki is very clear that “...despite the impact of American sociology on the development of sociology in Canada and India, for example, sociology in these other countries has not been a replica of the sociology of the United States” (Ibid.). Instead there has been a reaction against the domination of the centre and attempts to offset it (Chekki, 1987:59). For Chekki countries like Canada and India occupy a semi-peripheral place in the world of international social science, a condition which allows for some flexibility in approach.

More recently, A. Suresh Canagarajah has contributed to our understanding of the mechanisms of academic dependency by revealing how the conventions of social science serve to exclude scholars from peripheral areas. He divides these into communicative conventions and social conventions. Communicative conventions include the nature of acceptable texts (structure, tone, and style), as well as publishing formalities (protocol for interacting with journal editors and bibliographical formats for example). Social conventions involve “...the rituals, regulations, and relationships governing the interaction of members of the academic community” (Canagarajah, 2002:6). Canagarajah’s argument is that unfamiliarity or lack of expertise in these conventions creates the impression that peripheral scholars are less intellectually substantive than either Western scholars or those trained in the West. Through his own ethnographic observations of the academic community at the University of Jaffna in Sri Lanka he shows, however, that the scholarship produced is not inferior, just of a different nature and perhaps better suited (or adapted) to the conditions prevailing at its point of production. It is often equally a product of inadequate resources. Nevertheless, the barriers that are created by these social conventions are real enough and serve to create two unequal worlds of social science. Canagarajah’s work is especially useful to a study of journal editors as much of the conventions and constraints he documents revolve around the production of written work for an academic audience. In fact, in his recommendations he specifically discusses the role editors could play in adjusting the balance.

Syed Farid Alatas links academic dependency to the concept of academic imperialism arguing that whereas in the past control of the institutions producing social scientific knowledge used to perpetuate the rule of the core countries over the periphery was exercised directly and hence imperial in nature, today, it is produced indirectly in a system of academic neo-colonialism. Social science scholars in the periphery are integrated into international structures that subordinate their production of knowledge in ways that favour scholars in the core. For Alatas, a key element of these structures is psychological, involving a feeling of inferiority towards Western social science and its methods that has been inculcated in many scholars from the periphery over the course of their careers. Academic dependency manifests itself in the creation of a global division of labour that sees the core specialise in studies that are theoretical, comparative, and involving other countries. On the other hand, peripheral social science tends to focus on empirical work that involves a single case, usually that of the scholar's own country. It is clear from Alatas' work, however, that the relations of dependency which he describes are not a universal condition in Asia, the subject of his study. Alternatives abound; the problem is that "...they have not been able to become dominant or more influential..." due in large part to strength of the currently existing relations of dependency between core and periphery (Alatas, 2006:80).

Altbach, Garneau, Chekki, Caragarajah, and Alatas share a view that international social science as practiced today tends to be dominated by the paradigms of a select group of countries. The mechanism that they suggest lies behind this domination varies from the long-lasting effects of colonial history and imperialism to economic and political structures that induce expansionism and allow penetration, to the material and discursive conventions that help to establish and police academic disciplines. This is an important body of work. Academic dependency is not an issue that can be safely left till economic development makes challenges to the current order possible. Altbach noted this decades ago and in our oft-touted 'information age' the gravity of the problem can only have increased. Alongside the urgent need for a response to academic dependency for reasons of economy is another thought: academic dependency may be more difficult to fight as time passes, the reasons for which Garneau perceptively analysed. However, as Chekki and Alatas note, certain countries at least have been able to carve out their own, albeit, limited space for national social sciences. Hence, the importance of asking whether Singaporean social science, given the resources that its recent rapid economic growth has provided, has worked towards this goal. This is the broad question this article raises but cannot fully answer as it looks only at one component of the intellectual infrastructure that makes Singaporean social science possible: the editors of its academic journals. Studies of publishing houses, individual

scholars working in Singapore (see, for example, Thompson, 2006) and university managements, would provide other important perspectives on the issue; however, given that editors perform roles as gate-keepers as well as disseminators of ideas for disciplinary communities (Meadows, 1998), they make for an important starting point.

Method of the Study

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 editors representing a range of social science and related disciplines in Singapore. These interviews were conducted in the offices of the editors and ranged from 45 minutes to almost two hours in length. During the interviews a number of issues related to the publication of the journals were discussed. The actual identity of the editors and the journals they edit is not revealed and all editors are referred to using the masculine pronoun. Table 1 provides further information about these journals.

Table 1: Social Science Journals

Title	First Issue	# Issues per Year	Discipline	Publisher	Institutional Price per Year
ASEAN Economic Review	1984	3	Economics	ISEAS	US\$ 106 Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Japan; US\$ 133 elsewhere
Asia Pacific Journal of Education; continued from Singapore Journal of Education	1996; 1978	2	Education	Taylor & Francis	US\$ 724 (combined print and online)
Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development	1991	2	Social Work	Marshall Cavendish Academic	SG\$ 60 Asean/ Hong Kong/SAR; US\$ 53 elsewhere
Asian Journal of Communication	1990	4	Communication	Taylor & Francis	US\$ 307 (combined print and online)
Asian Journal of Social Science; continued from Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science; continued from Southeast Asian Journal of Sociology	2001; 1973; 1968	5	Social Science	Brill	US\$ 581 (combined print and online)

Table 1. (*cont.*)

Title	First Issue	# Issues per Year	Discipline	Publisher	Institutional Price per Year
Contemporary Southeast Asia	1979	3	International Relations	ISEAS	US\$ 66 Asia, Japan, Australia and New Zealand; US\$ 80 elsewhere
Journal of Information and Knowledge Management	2003	4	Management	World Scientific	US\$ 200 (combined print & online)
Journal of Southeast Asian Studies; continued from Journal of Southeast Asian History	1970; 1960	3	Social Science	Cambridge University Press	US\$ 157
Singapore Economic Review	1956	2	Economics	World Scientific	US\$ 160
Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography; continued from The Journal of Tropical Geography	1980; 1953	3	Geography	Blackwell Publishing	US\$ 250 in the Americas to; US\$ 340 elsewhere
Singapore Journal of Library and Information Management		1	Library Science	Library Association of Singapore	Singapore/Malaysia S\$ 40; S\$ 60 elsewhere
Singapore Management Review	1979	2	Management	Singapore Institute of Management	S\$ 20 Singapore
Sojourn	1986	2	Social Science	ISEAS	US\$ 56 Asia, Japan, Australia and New Zealand US\$ 76 elsewhere

Awareness of the Core/Periphery Divide

The interviews made it clear that most of the journal editors were aware of the existence of a divide between social science as practiced in core countries, such as the United States, and the periphery or semi-periphery. In fact, only one editor appeared completely unaware. However, the form that this awareness

took varied. In an ironic twist, one editor, for example, credited changing fashions in the West with the success of his publication. For him, the difference between core and periphery was expressed in terms of the academic marketplace: “If Iowa buys 20 copies of my journal and nobody else does, what can I do? I cannot ignore Iowa” (#1). In his opinion, without the shift in attention in what amounted to his greatest market, the journal would not have prospered so readily thus confirming in economic terms the disparity in power between social science giants and the rest of the world.

Another editor used the notion of gate-keeping and gatekeepers to speak of the problems his own journal faced in the unequal world of international social science (#2). But the gatekeepers in this case were not perceived as foreign to Singapore but residing in Singapore itself in the form of university management that decreed local journals inferior to international ones: “If you want to build up the journals here then you are caught in a bind, right? When you are telling your own faculty members not to or discouraging them from sending to your own journals because you are going to get one point instead of five if you send to an American journal” (#2). A similar perspective was given by another editor who noted that: “The papers you publish have to be in North America journals. So there is a slight slant towards North American and Anglo-Saxon journals” (#3).

The split between the social science core and periphery was also raised in terms of a division of labour between practical policy work and theoretical contributions to the discipline. The editor of one journal thought that he could best position his journal in the field by maintaining this split and focusing on policy material. Discussing the history of his journal he noted: “I then decided to abolish this focus on theory... and go back to what we were good at doing, which was policy...” (#4). This split, however, was also identified geographically: “If you are working on theory and if you are any good I think your first choice of publication, choice of journals, would be in the U.S. It’s only natural... many of the top journals are in the U.S.” (#4).

Linguistic preferences illustrated the existence of a social science divide in the account given by one respondent. Asked for his advice on establishing a new journal he stressed a piece of advice his own predecessor had given him, namely, to use English and English only for the journal title. Apparently, at the time his journal was establishing itself many others did not follow this recommendation, choosing to instead use names in regional languages and this, he suspected, was one reason for their failure to take off. For him the rule was: “Always use English. Because that’s where the world is, you see... everyone can understand because if you [give it a non-English title people will ask] what language is this? Of course there is a colon and subtitle, [the] subtitle will tell you what this is, you see, but then you are classified [in places nobody will

think of looking under] whereas if you classify it under [an English name] ... so that was a lesson I learned ... be forward looking” (#5). For him, it was a commonsense proposition that the people who mattered for the journal’s survival were most comfortable using English, in other words, part of the Anglo-American social science core, where English is the primary if not the only language spoken and ease of access is defined accordingly.

Aware and Concerned About the Division

A little over half of the editors were aware and concerned about the division within social science as practiced in the periphery and the core. Some related this concern to the survival or further development of their journal. One editor, for example, when asked about the disadvantages of publishing a journal in Singapore noted that, “You are not going to get that many contributions from let’s say the U.S. Or even Canada ... Because in the U.S. you have so many other journals and you get recognition easier if you publish in a [U.S. journal]” (#2). For another editor the problem was more indirect, stemming from his view that Asian scholars did not seem interested in citing each other. This editor believed that Asian scholars tended to be “not really savvy about cumulative knowledge building” which led, in his opinion, to a vicious cycle: “If you are not citing what others have written and people are not going to cite what you have written then the journal ... doesn’t benefit in knowledge building and so it is not really an internalised activity for professionals and then it affects the market ... so, overall, the visibility of the journal is affected” making it in the end even less likely to attract citations (#6). This editor was also interested in reaching out to other journal editors in an effort to jointly develop the academic infrastructure of the region with the aim of breaking the cycle.

Others were concerned for reasons beyond survival, considering that a regional voice was necessary for their discipline or field of study and that their efforts on behalf of the journal provided a channel for that voice. As one editor noted: “I’m glad I’ve played a role [and] been able to offer a platform for the view of, if you like, Southeast Asian scholars” (#1). The same editor went on to describe the benefits of his approach in the following terms: “The voices, if we are able to hear them, would have different perspectives on what is happening and that’s what we are uniquely placed to offer and it has been a struggle but I think it has been a worthwhile struggle” (#1). He believed that his journal could occupy a niche supplying regional data in a North American dominated world of social science, noting that: “We are uniquely positioned to do [this] as a journal” (#1). When asked to describe the functions his journal played in the field, another editor voiced a similar sentiment, arguing that

their journal "...allows scholars from Southeast Asia to publish their findings and to be read, you know, outside the region" (#2). Yet another editor expressed essentially the same view by noting that the one of the journal's functions was "...to help disseminate information especially from this part of the world" (#7). He was most interested in obtaining more material from Singapore's neighbours, listing Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia in particular.

This editor was also able and willing to do a great deal of editing, including the rewriting of large parts of articles, to accommodate different levels of English arguing that: "It is no use asking him to rewrite because he will come back with a slight improvement so if we feel that the content is good we spend time rewriting and after that we will go back to the author for a second look" (#7). This editor was exceptional in the apparent lengths he would go to repair or retrieve damaged but worthwhile, submissions. However, a number of other editors also signaled their concern with this major issue of peripheral social science by various degrees of willingness to fix poorly-written English. One, for example, told the interviewer that it "...was a tricky issue [but] since we try to encourage articles from the region, from regional scholars, OK, we will go ahead and send it for refereeing noting that this is an article from a non-English speaking country or whatever" (#2). Another indication that poor English could not be a sufficient reason not to accept a contribution from a regional scholar is provided by one editor who noted of his journal that: "I don't think we can turn [away] good papers of good quality which may be written in bad English" (#8).

Aware, Concerned, and Caught in a Dilemma

Although most of the editors were both aware and concerned over the differences between core and peripheral social science, for many this awareness was accompanied by a passion for improving the 'international' status of their journals. This combination of characteristics led to a number of paradoxes. These are examined below.

One of the most interesting of these paradoxes was provided by an editor who commented that: "We definitely want more local voices... to be saying something through the journal. And we are sympathetic about that... I think that's so important because basically there are a lot journals in the Anglo-Saxon world where people from the First World can express themselves, but none of the academics that fall within the [Third world] will get access to those journals because they will be thrown out at the very first level" (#9). He went on to note the difficulty that this created: "...because now, given the international stature of the journal, ... it is more difficult to save articles than in the past" (#9). But at the same time, the editor was clear that "...one of the future

ambitions of the board is to bring the [journal] to Tier 1 ... And the only way you can do that is you've got to make sure your citation count in the journal has got to go up ... that's something we would like to achieve" (#9). Here we can see on one hand the recognition of a core-periphery split in social science and the desire to do something about it. At other points in the interview this particular editor was very sympathetic to the barriers facing social scientists in the periphery in terms of facility with the English language and the various resources that make social science work possible (time, office support, and libraries, for example). Yet, at the same time, this sympathy did not preclude the goal of trying to enhance the journal's status even further. That such an improvement would only exacerbate the already tough job of getting Third World voices heard is not recognised.

Other editors similarly viewed with pride their record of helping local scholars. One, for example, stressed that: "You get a sense of achievement, in that you know ... a lot of young [regional] scholars, one of the first journals they do publish in would be [journal name]. If they get published it plays a role in their career. You can see some of these people have moved up the academic ladder and, of course, publish in more well-known and more international journals, but in the early part of their career they started out publishing in [journal name]. And I think that's something which is quite an achievement. It's a form of capacity building, trying to develop these young academic scholars" (#3). But at the same time, as this editor recognised the valuable contribution their journals had played in the lives of these scholars, he wanted to improve his journal's status by obtaining entry into the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), which he believed would result in the submission of "...better quality papers from all over the world" (#3). However, this would also remove the space that formerly allowed young or regional scholars to get published.

While most of the journal editors appeared unaware about the contradictions in their discourse, there was one exception. For this editor, the contradictions appeared not as insurmountable barriers to action, but requirements (authenticity, fluency and contemporariness) that needed to be balanced. Regional scholars could, of course, be said to possess authenticity but in many cases lacked the other two characteristics. As he noted: "The problem with [regional] voices is that they are not often fluent in English. So, in a sense, if you refuse to publish them because they do not meet international standards of intelligibility you are never going to get a chance to hear these voices because English is not their first language" (#1). They also tended to lack contemporariness by which he meant "...an awareness of the international literature, what the international literature is in regard to some of the issues..." (#1). These were issues he dealt with everyday as a journal editor, issues that he

described as an “intellectual tussle” that lead to a balance “...between the global and local, the national and the international” (#1). Certainly, this editor has made a compromise that promised in the long term to create “a regional database” that could challenge the predominantly North American views of the discipline. However, perhaps he was too quick to suggest that he had been able to find a balance between authenticity and contemporariness. In response to another question, he commented that the Internet made people less dependent on a “...library as a physical place and journal subscriptions” (#1). Similarly he noted that more people were studying abroad (presumably due to the availability of relatively cheap airfares) “...so that we basically say that even in communities that may be hard pressed there will be those who have access to the literature, those who have the training, those who have the norms of scholarship that are acceptable to us because we work in a particular marketplace” (#1). Are Internet connections and cheap fares sufficient to create a balance between authenticity, fluency and contemporariness? The Internet enables access, to be sure, but high subscription fees still tend to lock up the majority of academic literature produced in the world, while the awareness of recent academic debates grows dull and out-dated with time, if not refreshed periodically by contact with the core. Of course, there is the further problem of how authentic a voice trained by an institution thousands of kilometres away from the local context is. As Garneau points out of students trained in the centres of social science research: “If the structures involved are those of dependent capitalism (most likely the case), then the social science learned will probably rationalise this kind of relationship” (Garneau, 1991:62).

A final contradiction that was shared by a number of journals had to do with their relationships with international commercial publishers. As Table 1 shows, most of the journals were involved in such relationships and for many it was an undoubted blessing, especially in terms of ensuring the journal was globally recognised. As one editor noted, “I think it really became international when [our current publisher] said we would want to take over the journal, because international networks are international networks. Singapore is too small a place to penetrate the global marketplace of publishing” (#1). Very little criticism of the relationships was forthcoming. However, among the issues that this new kind of dependency could have raised for discussion was the price of the journal in relation to developing country budgets and the fact that the copyright control exercised by these publishers in effect locks up much of the social science literature to those unable to pay. It is well known that commercial publishers have been responsible for much of the higher than inflation cost increases to academic serial literature over the past few decades and that a few houses now comprise an oligopoly of sorts in the industry (McCabe, 2002; Edlin and Rubinfeld, 2004). Of course, the major price

increases have been in science and medical subjects but it is also clear that developing countries cannot afford even small price increases. Only one editor hinted at these concerns. His editorial board was considering whether to move to a commercial publisher but was undecided because "...it would be just another commercial [product] as you know once you sort it out to [the publisher] ... it would be a different set of dynamics altogether" (#2).

Aware, but Not Concerned or Only Weakly Concerned

Four of the journal editors were aware of differences between core and peripheral social science but did not appear concerned in terms of either their own survival or from the point of view of the regional social science community. It might be tempting to predict that these editors worked with journals that had already achieved international stature but this was not the case. Only one editor clearly viewed his journal as highly placed in the discipline; "playing in the big leagues" was how he described it. For this editor, no concessions due to regional concern or interest could interfere with the operation of the journal. Describing the origins of his journal, he noted that nationalism never played a part in its operation: "No, the sort of professionalism, academic integrity, quality and so on ... whoever was good will get in, whoever is lousy will get out" (#5). Good English, for example, was expected of all: "Even if you are Japanese, Chinese or Korean who cannot write English properly, all we insist on is grammatical English. We don't rewrite for you" (#5). In fact, Singapore itself was seen as unnecessary for the journal's operation; a logical place given the subject matter the journal dealt with and with good air connections but, in the end, his view was that, "We can move this office to any part of the world you know and it will still do the same" (#5). For this editor the world was the social science core: "I think the game is out there, it's not here. And so we publish with [an international publisher who] can sell worldwide ... the budget (?) is too high for Asia and not in Africa, of course. Asia is China, not even China, it is Japan. China cannot afford us either ... so we are talking about that kind of world, you see" (#5).

The other journals were not at the same level but their editors hoped that with some hard work and innovation they would achieve a certain level of international recognition in the near future. In both cases they recognised the existence of core and peripheral social science but believed that their own paths lead towards the core. One of them described the decisions that needed to be made in the following way: "Do you please the international crowd? Or do you do well domestically? I think some balance is called for but sometimes balance doesn't work because you are neither here or there. Here we are driving towards international" (#4). In keeping with this view this same author

had previously commented that one of his goals for the future was to “Break into North America... definitely crack [that] nut” (#4).

The other editor was also keen at getting closer to core (which he identified as getting listed in SSCI) and believed that he was almost there: “I think that, in general, this journal is cited quite a lot in the field... once we get it out on time for two years the rest follows naturally” (#10). However, like the other journals he was not interested in helping rewrite poorly-written articles, arguing that: “I don’t see it as my job to rewrite,” and “I’ve never come across an article that was poorly written but had good ideas. Because... facility with the language helps you articulate your articles and the nuances... I haven’t received one yet where I thought, ‘Wow, if this was rewritten it would be a brilliant article.’ ...and if I received something, and I have in the past where almost every sentence had to be rewritten, I would just reject it and I would say to the author get it professionally edited” (#10).

The fourth editor, although convinced that the journal could do better, was not particularly concerned about competing internationally. For him, the journal was a regional affair which would be primarily of interest to those in Asia: “There is a lot of research that is only or more appropriate or useful to local readers. So here still I think in the region we have some research done which is more relevant to local people... we consider it a regional journal, regional issues, regional problems, regional topics of interest... the basic purpose is to highlight research done in this part of the world” (#11). This editor believed that a lot could be done to strengthen the journal’s academic quality but did not appear concerned that it was currently not international in scope.

The Field of Singaporean Social Science

Although most journal editors are aware of a split between core and peripheral social science they are also mostly eager to continue playing the game as defined by that same core. Some of the insights of Bourdieu appear applicable here. Bourdieu argues that any area of human social interaction may be conceptualised as a field of positions created as part of a “logic of difference” or “significant distinctions” (Bourdieu, 1985:730). Agents assume positions in these fields depending on the volume of capital they possess and “...the relative weight of the different species of capital, economic and cultural...” within that total (Bourdieu, 1989:17). The exact nature of these “different species of capital” varies depending on the field in question.

For our purposes, it is Bourdieu’s analysis of the scientific field that is of importance. Here he argues that the field “...is the locus of a competitive

struggle, in which the specific issue at stake is the monopoly of scientific authority” (Bourdieu, 1975:19). For those who are part of the field, “... every scientific choice — the choice of the area of research, the choice of methods, the choice of the place of publication — ... is a political investment strategy, directed, objectively at least, towards the maximisation of strictly scientific profit” (Bourdieu, 1975:23). However, what complicates this operation is the unique characteristic of the scientific field; namely, that “...the producers have no other market than their fellow producers...” so that it is necessary for each producer to develop products that can withstand the detailed and often hostile scrutiny of his colleagues, who are also his competitors. This same characteristic makes it necessary for the producer not to just distinguish himself from other producers, but “...to integrate the work of predecessors and rivals into a new construction...” so that “...the definition of what is at stake in the scientific struggle is thus one of the issues at stake in the scientific struggle, and the dominant are those who manage to impose the definition of science which says that the most accomplished realisation of science consists in having, being, and doing what they have, are or do” (Bourdieu, 1975:24).

These dominant scientists, having accumulated the most scientific capital, occupy the highest positions in the field and seek primarily to maintain their position through strategies of conservation (Bourdieu, 1975:27). Others seeking the highest positions for themselves must decide on whether to adopt strategies of succession or subversion. Strategies of succession are generally “...risk-free investments ... which are guaranteed to bring them, at the end of a predictable career, the profits awaiting those who realise the official ideal of scientific excellence though limited innovation within authorised limits” (Bourdieu, 1975:30). On the other hand, strategies of subversion are “...infinitely more costly and more hazardous investments which will not bring them the profit ... unless they can achieve a complete redefinition of the principles legitimating domination” (Bourdieu, 1975:30).

Many of Singapore’s social science editors, having realised the nature of the international structure of social science but still keen on playing the game as structured by the dominant actors, appear to be adopting succession strategies. They hope that by following the guidelines set down by the core their journal will eventually succeed in attracting scientific capital in sufficient quantities for them to move to higher positions in the field. Strategies that attempt to subvert the dominant role of the West in international social science by, for example, sympathetic attempts to enlist contributions from neighbouring countries while helping to maintain quality work, appear much rarer. Thus it would appear that Singapore’s newfound status as a member of

the semi-periphery or marginal member of the core has not resulted in journal strategies that seek to upset the current dominance of core social science.

What this amounts to is a lost opportunity to apply Samir Amin's advice to developing countries to selectively delink from the West (Amin, 1990), a call that may be difficult in the economic realm, but practical enough for the world of social science. Social science is inherently local and, as Alatas suggests, "... a collection of Western social science classics, local reading materials and the empirical field of the researcher's society are the right ingredients for an autonomous social science tradition" (Alatas, 2006:75). On the other hand, from its early years of independence Singapore has been called on to follow in the footsteps of the West, to achieve excellence as defined by the First World rather than regional neighbours or even internally (Lian, 1999). Given this context, perhaps for most journal editors there never was a choice over the type of strategy chosen and regional perspective adopted.

Conclusion

In this article, I have posed the broad question of the orientation of social science in Singapore. Given its newfound position as a solid member of the global semi-periphery, has social science in Singapore been able to develop alternatives to academic dependency on the West? This is of course too broad a question to be fully answered in a journal article. Instead, I focused on one segment of Singapore's social science infrastructure, journal editors. In the interviews with these individuals, it becomes clear that there is an awareness of a division between journals published in the West and those from other parts of the world. However, in terms of wholeheartedly working towards developing regional alternatives, there appears a more contradictory pattern of reactions. The majority of editors are keen to develop regional perspectives or voices in their journals but they are equally keen to compete with North American and European journals on their own terms. A significant minority, however, are focused squarely on that world to the near exclusion of other concerns. In the final part of the article, I argued that the views of Singapore's journal editors closely reflects the adoption of what Bourdieu describes as a "succession strategy" in the playing of the social science game. The result is a missed opportunity at applying some form of delinking strategy as recommended by Samir Amin in situations of dependency be they economic or intellectual.

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