Featured Article

# Post-Cold War Transformations of Global Literary Capitals in the Dissemination and Circulation of Southeast Asian Literatures

Ramon Guillermo

**Abstract:** Using data from UNESCO's Index Translationum, the present article hopes to show how inter-lingual translational relations within Southeast Asia and between Southeast Asian countries and the world have changed due to the end of the Cold War. These transformations have turned out to be most obvious in relation to the global literary capitals which have functioned to disseminate Southeast Asian literature on a global scale. The article concludes with some observations on the possible rise of Global South literary capitals as well as the development of a Global South literary canon which these imply.

**Keywords:** literary capitals, Third World Literature, UNESCO, translational statistics, Southeast Asia

## I. Presenting Translational Data as Network Graphs

What are the prerequisites for the formation of global "Literary Capitals"? And what are the processes which could create such entities? These questions necessarily involve the translation and circulation of books and texts. If these processes are not greatly facilitated in some way, the development of such capitals across national borders becomes an impossibility. While maintaining one's reservations regarding most of Pascale Casanova's blindly Eurocentric formulations, one can agree with her idea that a "literary capital" is basically a "function" within the international literary space (Casanova 2002, 2012). In this context, it is therefore necessary, as she says, to consider languages and languages of mediation, translators, publishers, and critics. In order to study this problem on a more empirical plane and avoid reliance on "vague impressions" (Mollier 1994), graphs were generated from data retrieved from UNESCO's Index Translationum (UNESCO n.d.). According to the UNESCO website,

> The Index Translationum is a list of books translated in the world, i.e., an international bibliography of translations. The Index Translationum

was created in 1932. The database contains cumulative bibliographical information on books translated and published in about one hundred of the UNESCO Member States between 1979 and 2009 and totals more than 2,000,000 entries in all disciplines: literature, social and human sciences, natural and exact sciences, art, history and so forth.

The Index Translationum is currently the world's largest database on translations in terms of the volume of data. This is not to say that the list of entries is complete. One immediately notices many gaps and omissions as one begins to use it. Moreover, it does not give complete information on the matter of relay translations. It should therefore be kept in mind that it can only give us rough images which can allow some insight to broad historical trends.

Figure 1 represents the data on eight selected Southeast Asian countries, namely, Philippines, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, from the period covered by Index Translationum from 1979 to 2009. The network graphs generated from the data obtained show eight color-coded countries connected with the city of address of publishers that have printed translations of works originally written in their respective national languages. The thickness of the lines represents the relative frequency of works translated or the intensity of translation of each Southeast Asian country in relation to the cities connected to them. By this means, one can already observe the major nodes of translation and dissemination of Southeast Asian works in the graph, namely, Moscow, Tokyo, and Paris. Cities that connect to only a single Southeast Asian country were removed to show only cities that play roles in the interconnectedness of countries in the region.
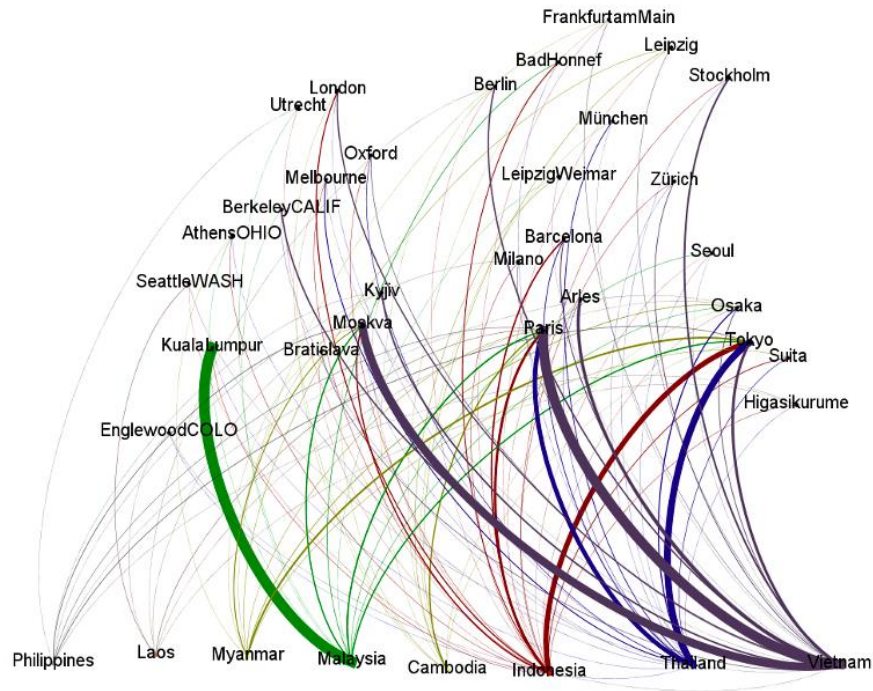
FIGURE 1: The Literary Capitals of Southeast Asia from 1979 to 2009 (data from UNESCO)

Figure 2a shows these interconnections within the period covered by the Index coinciding with the Cold War which, in this case, is the ten-year period 1979 to 1988. Because of this limitation, observations must be confined to the period for which there is available data even though the Cold War had already begun much earlier in the late 1940s. It can be seen from the graph that the major capitals of translation and dissemination of Southeast Asian literatures during this period were, as with the first graph, Moscow, Tokyo, and Paris. One should emphasize that the peculiar usage of "literary capital" here means that a city does not actually have to be in Southeast Asia to be considered a literary capital of Southeast Asia. Naturally, the formation of such literary capitals which select works to be translated and published as well as exert influence on their circulation and reception on a supra- or international scale must be understood in relation to, even if not reducible to, matters of political and economic power. Several works from seven Southeast Asian countries were published in Moscow from 1979 to 1990. The role of Thailand as an important base for US operations in Southeast Asia during the Cold War could be a factor in the striking non-publication of any Thai works in Moscow during this period (Osornprasop 2012). Particularly strongly represented in Moscow and Paris were works from Vietnam and Indonesia. On the other hand, Indonesia and Thailand were both well-represented in Tokyo. In comparison with Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam, national language literatures from the Philippines, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia were much less frequently translated into other languages. The publication emphasis on either Vietnam or Thailand probably reflected the Cold War, communist and anti-communist division while the common interest in Indonesian literature probably represented a state

of geopolitical contestation around Indonesia despite the devastating effects of Suharto's US-supported coup of 1965 (Anwar 2012). Though it never sanctioned the term, Moscow could be considered a foremost point of dissemination of Southeast Asian literature in the spirit of "Third Worldist" internationalism (Djagalov 2020, 5). Aside from Moscow, other capitals in the Soviet zone involved in publishing Southeast Asian literature were Riga (Latvia), Kiev (Ukraine), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Frunze, and Tashkent (Uzbekistan). It will be recalled that Tashkent was the place where the inaugural congress of what would become the Afro-Asian Writer's Association was held in 1958 (Liu 2019, 24). Pramoedya Ananta Toer from Indonesia was at that founding congress while Amado V. Hernandez, a radical Filipino writer would participate in the 1966 Afro-Asian Writers' Emergency Conference in Beijing, China (Liu 2019, 26; Torres-Yu 1986, xi). The Lotus Magazine and the Lotus Prize associated with the Afro-Asian Writer's Association would be influential institutions in the dissemination of Third World literature during this period (Djagalov 2020, 91).
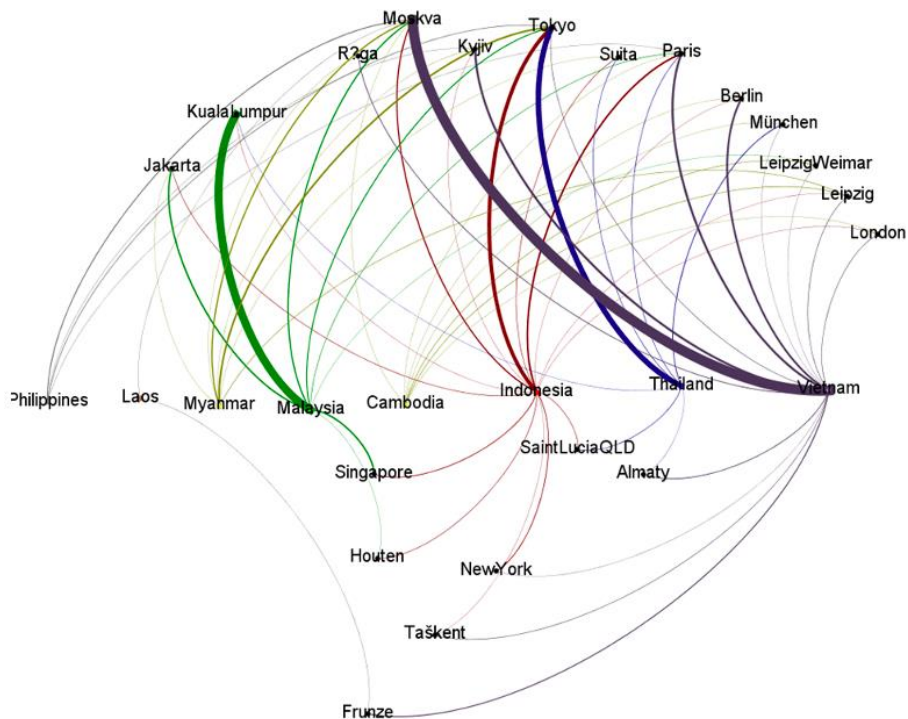


FIGURE 2a: The Literary Capitals of Southeast Asia during the Cold War from 1979 to 1988 (data from UNESCO)

The German cities of Berlin, Munich, and Leipzig were also active in publishing German language translations of Southeast Asian literature. Tokyo was perhaps the center of dissemination of Southeast Asian literature into East Asia (i.e., the "Sinosphere") through Nihongo literate intellectuals in South Korea and China. Kuala Lumpur figures in the graph as the main city where translations from Malay to English are published. However, the readership of these latter translations most likely the Malaysians themselves. In summary,

Figure 2a shows the roles of Moscow, Tokyo, and Paris as world literary capitals of Southeast Asian literature during the Cold War era. English, with some important exceptions, did not play a sufficiently large role to lend Southeast Asian literature a wider international reception. Indeed, the important roles of Russian, Japanese, and French as major languages in disseminating Southeast Asian literature at the time should serve to relativize the mistaken emphasis on English as the only language of international import.

In terms of linguistic inter-translational relations, Figure 2b shows that the most translated Southeast Asian language from 1979 to 1988 was Vietnamese, most notably into Russian and dozens of languages in the former Soviet Union as well as languages used in other states close to it. The thickness of the lines represents the relative frequency of works translated or the intensity of translation of each Southeast Asian country in relation to the cities connected to them. The size of the text label corresponds to the "between centrality" value. A node with a high value for the latter intuitively means that it is more directly connected to other nodes in the graph. This is related to the "degree" which merely indicates the number of nodes directly connected to a node. One can safely assume that the great majority of these translations were relay translations from Russian. Indonesian language works were translated most frequently into English, Japanese, and Dutch, while Thai was translated into Japanese, English, and German. Burmese works were translated relatively frequently into Japanese. As has already been noted, the translation of Malay into English was mostly done for Malaysian consumption within Malaysia itself.
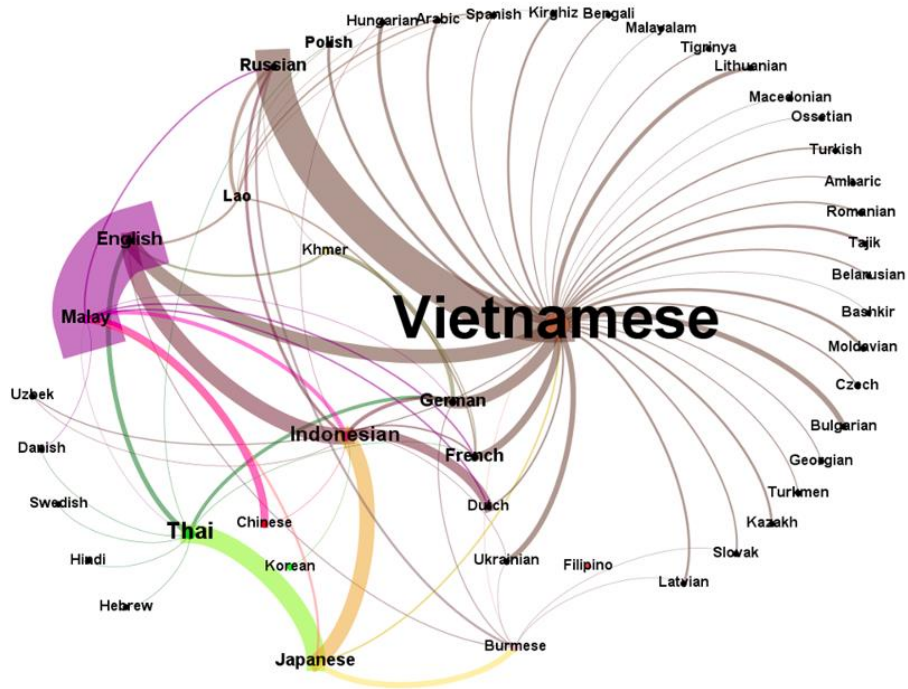
Translations from Southeast Asian Languages (1979-1988)

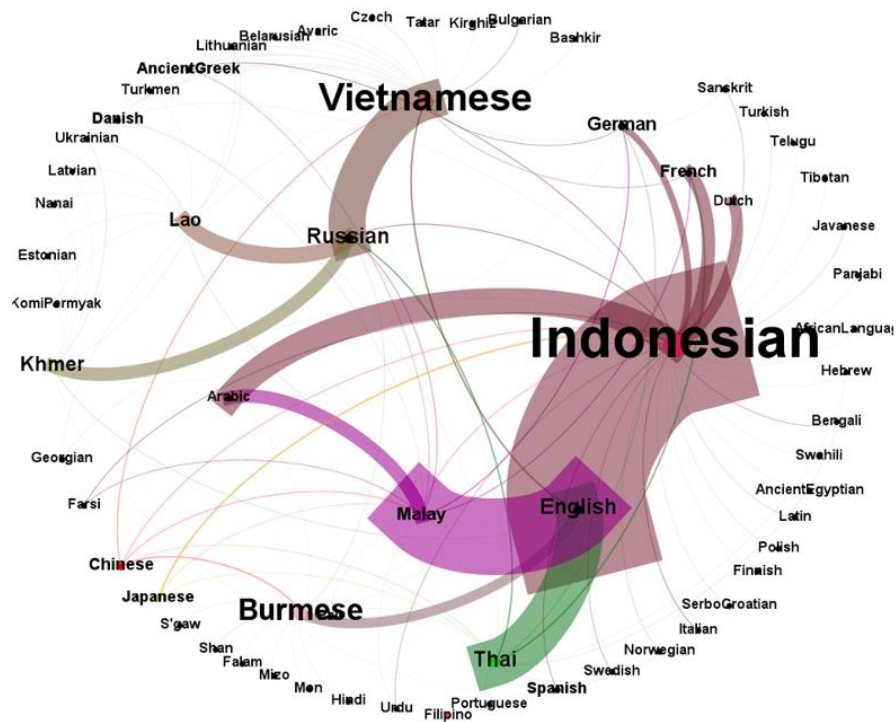| Language | Degree | Betweenness Centrality |
|---|---|---|
| Vietnamese | 34 | 760.509503 |
| Thai | 10 | 151.016324 |
| Indonesian | 12 | 93.324076 |
| English (TL) | 7 | 65.403402 |
| Malay | 10 | 59.468641 |
| French (TL) | 6 | 59.062005 |
| German (TL) | 6 | 52.470005 |
| Japanese (TL) | 5 | 42.249587 |
| Russian (TL) | 6 | 32.419322 |
| Polish (TL) | 2 | 20.981195 |

TL = target language

FIGURE 2b: Target Languages of Translations from Southeast Asian Languages from 1979 to 1988 (data from UNESCO)

On the other hand, in the same period, Figure 2c shows that the most translated languages into Southeast Asian languages were Russian and English. Russian texts were translated mainly into Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese. English texts were translated into Malay, Thai, Burmese, and, on a very large scale, Indonesian. One may perhaps also assume that the majority of non-English original source texts translated into Indonesian were relay translations from existing English translations. Arabic, German, French, and Dutch were the other most frequently translated original source languages of the texts translated into Indonesian. Some Chinese and Japanese original language texts were also translated into Southeast Asian languages. Due to their cultural, geographical, and historical proximity, Chinese translations into Vietnamese and Burmese were mostly likely from the original

language rather than relay translations from English. To give a more complete picture of interrelations within Asia, Figure 2d is a representation of the translations from the main languages of the Sinosphere, namely, Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, and Korean (excluding Vietnamese) into other languages in the world. From 1979 to 1988, one sees here the dominant and almost one-way translation of texts from Chinese to either Japanese or Korean (the data does not indicate a difference between "Korean" languages in the North and the South). By far the dominant target language of translations from Chinese and Japanese was English. Though Russian remained behind English, French, and German, it was still significant as a target language.



Translations into Southeast Asian Languages (1979-1988)

| Language | Degree | Betweenness Centrality |
|---|---|---|
| Indonesian | 33 | 925.87762 |
| Vietnamese | 20 | 550.783698 |
| Burmese | 14 | 371.35162 |
| Thai | 16 | 170.327317 |
| English (SL) | 7 | 165.407437 |
| Russian (SL) | 7 | 165.407437 |
| Khmer | 10 | 161.287757 |
| German (SL) | 6 | 107.306518 |
| Lao | 9 | 105.736315 |
| Malay | 14 | 92.969006 |

SL = source language

FIGURE 2c: Source Languages of Translations into Southeast Asian Languages from 1979 to 1988 (data from UNESCO)
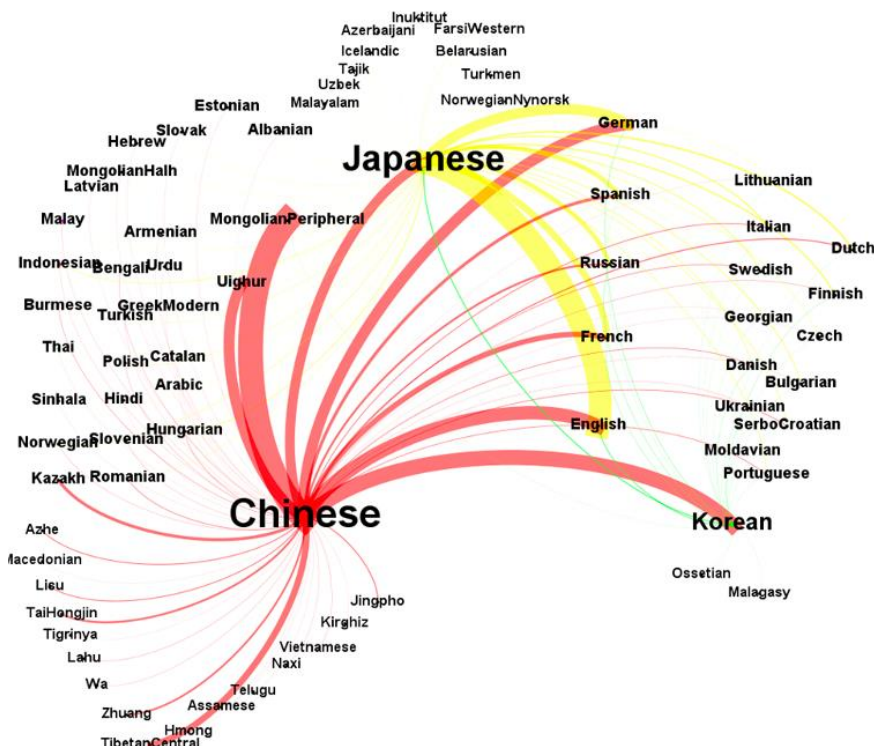
FIGURE 2d: Translations from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean into Other Languages including each other (1979-1988) (total translations: 7568)

Figure 3a shows the visible translational interrelations in the post-Cold War era from 1989 to 2009. The end of the Cold War is dated here from the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Comparison with Figure 2a shows the dramatic reduction in the role of Moscow (and all other cities in the Soviet territories) as a world capital of Southeast Asian literature. Paris and Tokyo would maintain their presence in what seems to have become a context of a greater variety of places of publication of Southeast Asian literature. Works from all eight Southeast Asian countries represented in the graph were published in Paris and Osaka. Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam would continue to be the most prominent Southeast Asian countries on a global scale. Many publishers in several cities apparently shared a common interest in these three countries. Translations of works from Thailand and Vietnam continued to be dominant representatives of Southeast Asia in the literary capital of Paris (Mollier 1994). Figure 3a shows that Thailand and Vietnam received a lot of interest from the same cities in common, most notably in the city of La Tour d'Aigues in France where the famous publisher Éditions de l'Aube is situated. However, publications of works from Indonesia appear to be rather more widely distributed in different cities and languages of the world. The Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos continued to play almost negligible roles in the immediate post-Cold War era. This period seems to mark a shift from the dominant role of geopolitical considerations in the dissemination and formation of a "Third World literature" towards the rise of a greater market-driven impetus in the dissemination of Southeast Asian literature.
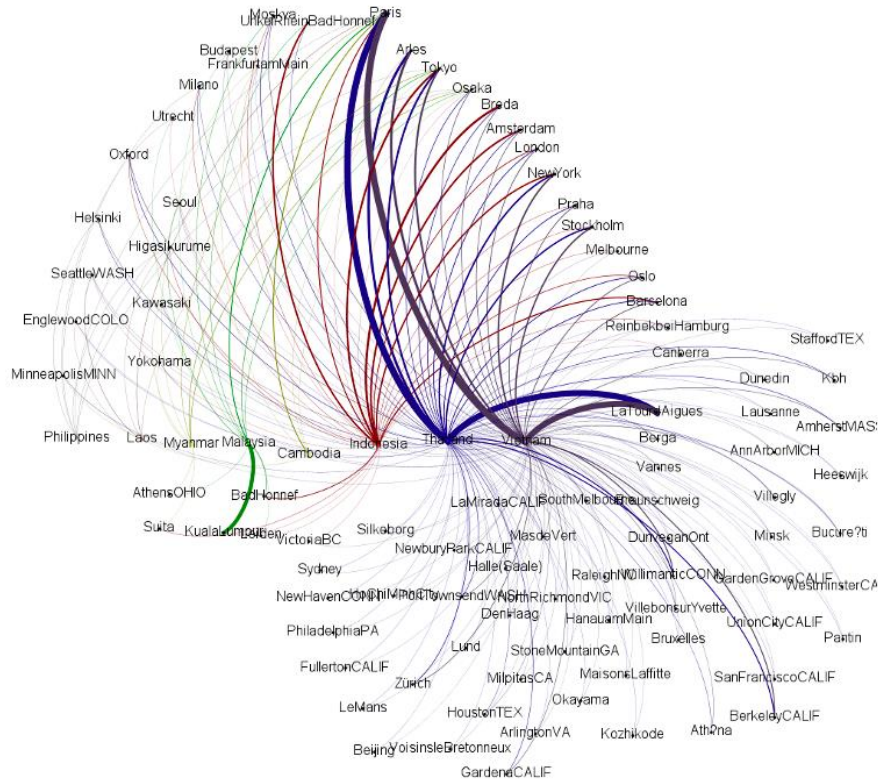
FIGURE 3a: The Literary Capitals of Southeast Asia in the post-Cold War era from 1989 to 2009 (data from UNESCO)

Moving once again to the issue of linguistic inter-translational relations, one sees in Figure 3b that the most translated Southeast Asian language in this period is still Vietnamese but the main target languages have shifted from Russian and the dozens of languages from the former Eastern bloc to English and French as the main target languages. German and Japanese continue to be important target languages while Russian has assumed a drastically much less significant role. The translation of Indonesian language works also appears to have appreciably increased. The main target languages for Indonesian are English, Dutch, German, and Japanese. Thai, the third most translated language was mostly translated into English, French, and Japanese. Notably, Japanese and Chinese original works were also translated into Chinese and Japanese.
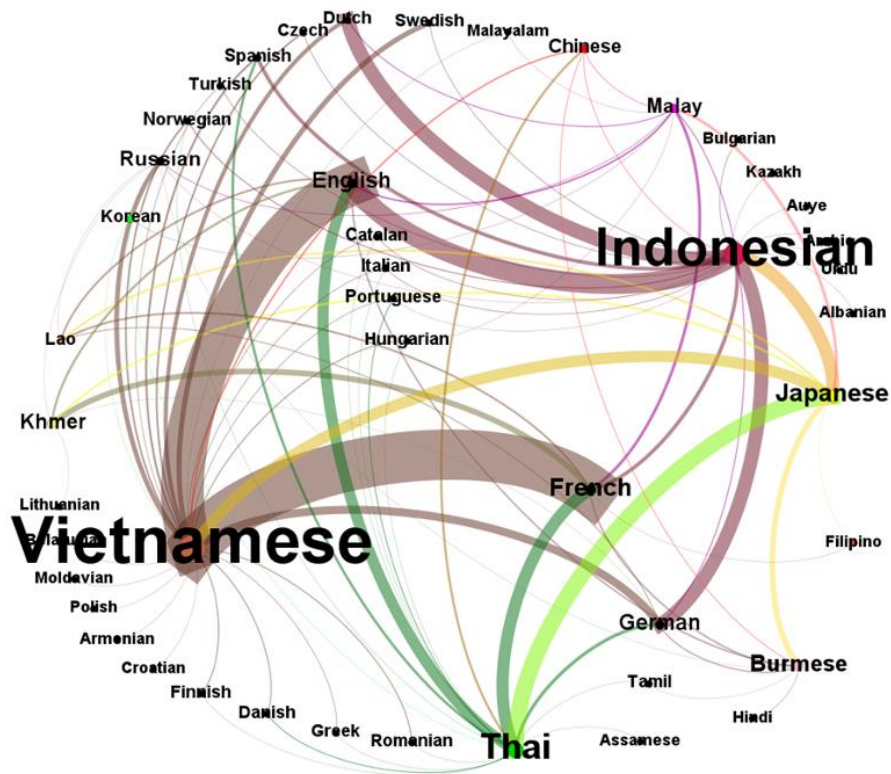
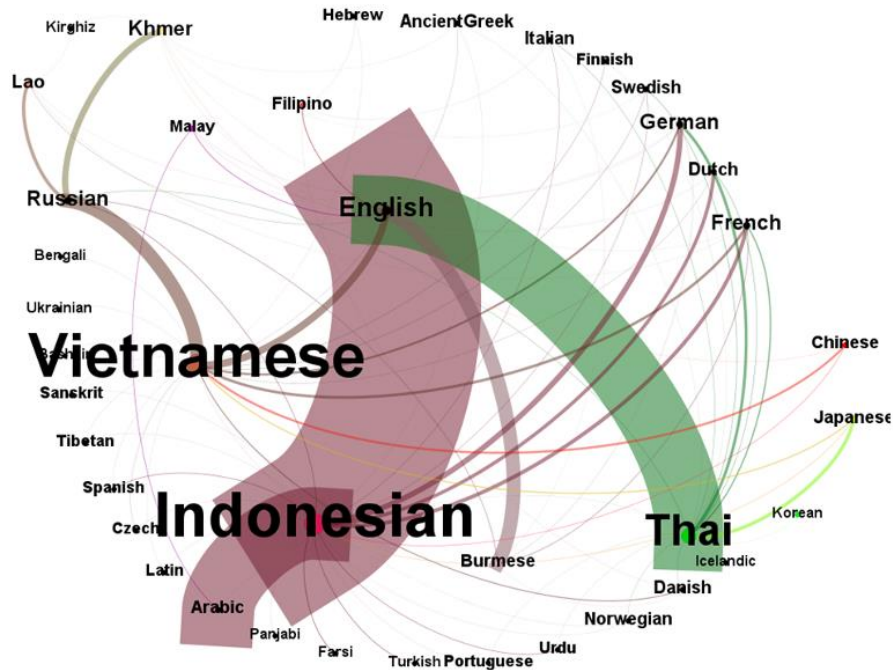**Translations from Sotheast Asian Languages (1989-2009)**

| Language | Degree | Betweenness Centrality |
|---|---|---|
| Vietnamese | 27 | 412.200487 |
| Indonesian | 21 | 313.966939 |
| Thai | 18 | 163.939323 |
| Japanese (TL) | 8 | 70.292719 |
| French (TL) | 8 | 70.292719 |
| Burmese | 8 | 59.121388 |
| German (TL) | 7 | 49.292719 |
| English (TL) | 7 | 49.292719 |
| Khmer | 6 | 45.128546 |
| Russian (TL) | 6 | 35.819499 |

TL = target language

FIGURE 3b: Target Languages of Translations from Southeast Asian Languages from 1979 to 1988 (data from UNESCO)

Looking at the opposite translational direction as shown in Figure 3c, English has become the most translated language into Southeast Asian languages. Having been translated consistently on a large scale into Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, and Burmese have followed suit in intensified translation work from English. Though translation from Vietnamese into Russian has much diminished in this period, Russian still remains the major source language for Vietnamese translations. The same holds for Khmer and Lao. Translations from Arabic into Indonesian have meanwhile increased substantially in these years.

**Translations into Southeast Asian Languages (1989-2009)**

| Language | Degree | Betweenness Centrality |
|---|---|---|
| Indonesian | 22 | 249.681718 |
| Vietnamese | 21 | 242.942565 |
| Thai | 17 | 153.531872 |
| English (SL) | 8 | 61.07654 |
| German (SL) | 6 | 31.80156 |
| Russian (SL) | 6 | 30.480021 |
| French (SL) | 6 | 30.480021 |
| Khmer | 7 | 27.673746 |
| Lao | 5 | 16.806892 |
| Dutch (SL) | 4 | 14.580525 |

SL = source language

FIGURE 3c: Source Languages of Translations into Southeast Asian Languages from 1979 to 1988 (data from UNESCO)

With respect to the Sinosphere, Figure 3d indicates that translations from Chinese to Korean have greatly been reduced in number and have now shifted in favor of translations from Korean into Chinese as well as into other languages such as Japanese and French. Russian has all but disappeared as a significant target language of translation in this context. One notices that the Southeast Asian sphere in both the Cold War and Post-Cold War periods did not have any significant connection with the Sinosphere in terms of translations from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean into Southeast Asian languages.
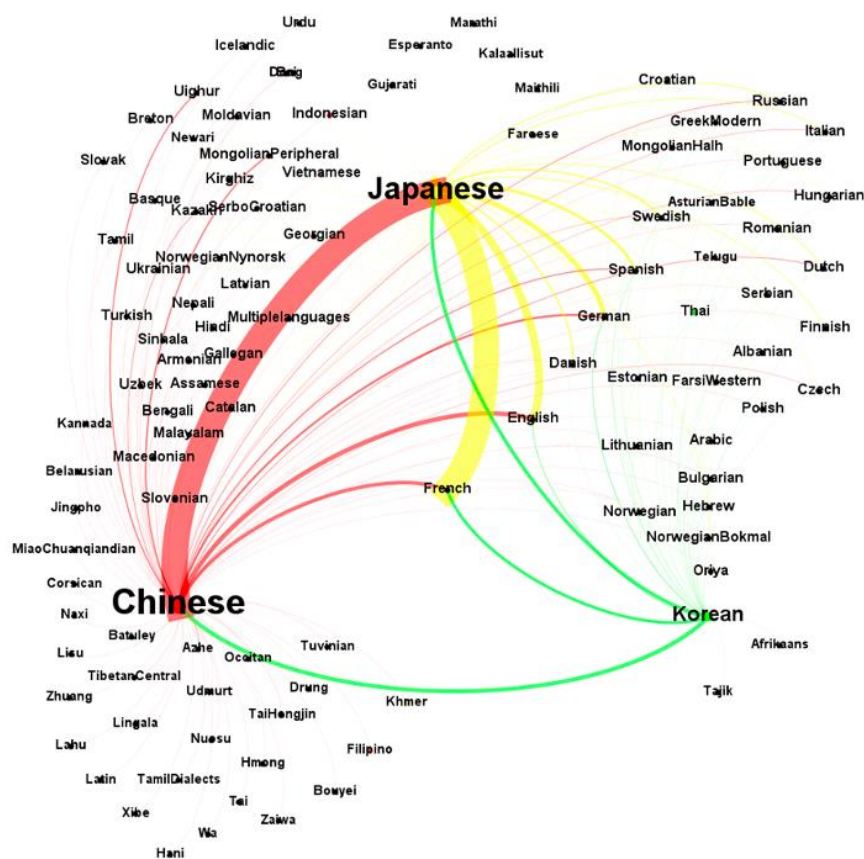
FIGURE 3d: Translations from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean into Other Languages including each other (1989-2009) (total translations: 37278)

Finally, Figure 4 uses data from Index Translationum from 1979 to 2010. It shows the cities where two Indonesian and two Vietnamese writers of contrasting political alignments were translated and published. The first Indonesian writer is Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006), Indonesian novelist, author of the Buru Quartet, accused of being a communist by the Suharto regime and imprisoned from 1965 to 1979. The second Indonesian writer is Mochtar Lubis (1922-2004), writer of the novel Twilight in Jakarta (1963) and co-founder of the monthly literary magazine Horison which was closely tied with the Congress of Cultural Freedom (CCF) which was funded by the CIA (Mendoza 2022; Djagalov 2020, 75-77). The first Vietnamese writer is Tô Hoài (1920-2014), popular writer, an officer of the Vietnamese Writer's Association and winner of the Ho Chi Minh Prize for Literature in 1996. The second Vietnamese writer is Dương Thu Hương (born 1947), a Vietnamese novelist labelled as a dissident and author of the novel Paradise of the Blind (1988) who now lives in France. These four authors were selected for the reason that they were among the most translated and published writers in their respective countries as shown by the UNESCO data.
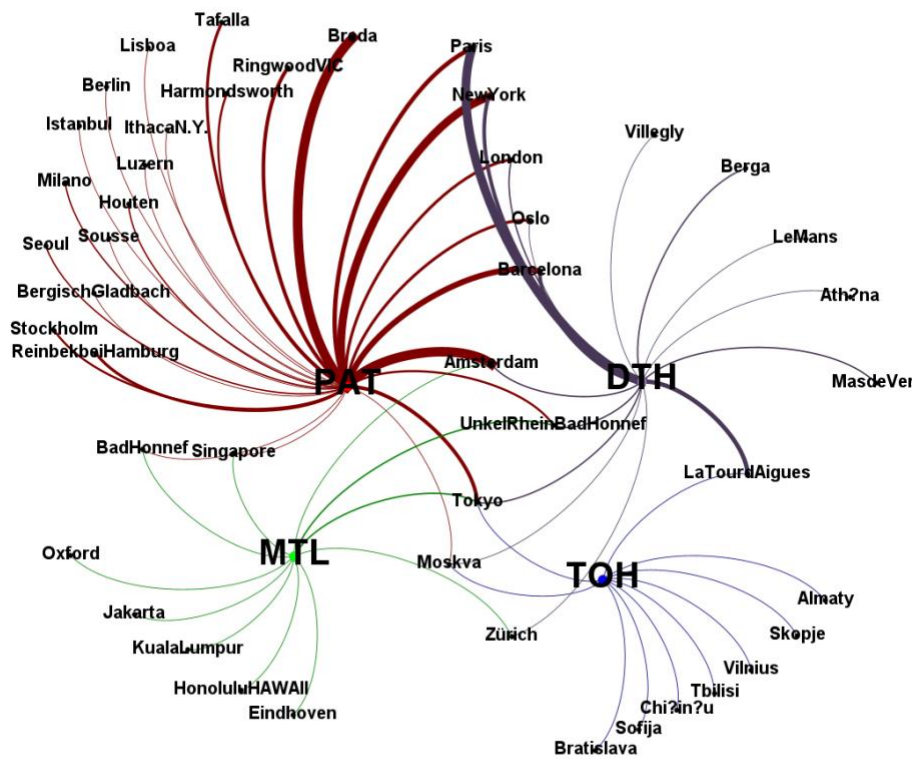
FIGURE 4: Four Writers from Southeast Asia from 1979 to 2009 (data from UNESCO)

Pramoedya was published in 27 cities and most frequently in the cities of Amsterdam and Breda, both in the Netherlands. On the other hand. Mochtar Lubis' works were published in eleven cities. Tô Hoài was published in ten cities including Moscow. As observed above, it is probable that other translations within the Soviet zone of influence were relay translations from Russian. These include translations of his work in the cities of Almaty (former capital of Kazakhstan), Bratislava (a capital of the former Czechoslovakia), Chișinău (capital of Moldavia), Tbilisi (capital of Georgia), Skopje (formerly in Yugoslavia), Sofija (capital of Bulgaria), and Vilnius (capital of Lithuania). On the other hand, Dương Thu Hươn was published in 16 cities but most frequently and most notably in Paris. Of the four, all except Mochtar Lubis were published in Moscow. All four authors were published in Tokyo. Pramoedya and Dương Thu Hương were both well represented in the Western cities of Paris, New York, London, Oslo, Barcelona, and Amsterdam. The configuration of Figure 4 reveals the geopolitical schisms in the Cold War era. The Third World Republic of Letters which received and disseminated writers such as Tô Hoài has vanished with the fading of Moscow as a world literary capital (Djagalov 2020, 219). Despite these shifts, Pramoedya has remained the subject of universal admiration and contestation (Anderson 2013).

## II. Some Concluding Observations and Speculations

During the Cold War era, the global capitals of the Southeast Asian literature were arguably located in the First and Second Worlds. There were none in Southeast Asia itself. "Third World Literature" as a distinct canon took shape in the literary capitals of the East through Soviet internationalism and in the West through the New Left solidarity movements. Obviously, these two tendencies were not completely unrelated or mutually exclusive although the main language of global dissemination back to the Third World was mediated via English. In contrast with the other main geopolitical contenders in the Cold War, China's observed relative lack of inter-translational relations with Southeast Asia may be somewhat surprising. However, this is simply due to the fact that the available data begins in 1979, after the period of revolutionary internationalism in China. The massive translational projects of Maoism involving the Little Red Book and the Selected Works of Mao Zedong in the '50s and '60s were therefore not captured (Han 2004; Cook 2014). On the other hand, Japanese was a major target language of translations from Southeast Asian texts before and after 1989. Nevertheless, one notes that Japanese hardly functioned the other way around as a source language of translation into Southeast Asian languages. Despite this, the role of translations into Japanese should not be underestimated as a relay language for Chinese and Korean readers. Chinese played a consistently minor role except perhaps for the substantial translations into Malay in the period from 1979 to 1988 which is likely to also mostly be a phenomenon internal to Malaysia.

The post-Cold War period meant the dismantling of the Soviet Third World translational internationalism and of its multilingual translational policies within the Eastern bloc as can be seen in Table 1. This may have caused the overall reduction in the number of translations in Southeast Asia. From 54.7 translations per year in the period 1979 to 1988, there was a decline to 45 translations per year from 1989 to 2009. Though translations from Southeast Asian languages, particularly Vietnamese, into Russian have withered, Russian nevertheless continued to be a major source language of Vietnamese translations. Even granting that the influence of Russian was already confined just to Vietnamese, Khmer, and Lao, its greatly diminished role has meant that English has become by default the sole most dominant source language of translations into Southeast Asian Languages. Going in the opposite direction, the main target languages of translations from Southeast Asian languages during the Cold War were Russian, English, and Japanese, followed by French and German. After the Cold War, the languages remained the same except for Russian, which has simply dropped out. The post-Cold War era shows a pluralization and relative depolarization of reception of Southeast Asian literature. During this period, the geopolitical impetus behind the formation of a Third World literary canon apparently gives way to the global commodification of literary goods subject to the vicissitudes of market forces.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Burmese | Slovak | | Avaric | Vietnamese |
| Burmese | Ukrainian | | Bashkir | Vietnamese |
| Burmese | Russian | | Belarusian | Vietnamese |
| Burmese | Latvian | | Bulgarian | Vietnamese |
| Indonesian | Hungarian | | Czech | Vietnamese |
| Indonesian | Russian | | Estonian | Khmer |
| Indonesian | Ukrainian | | Estonian | Lao |
| Indonesian | Uzbek | | Georgian | Indonesian |
| Khmer | Russian | | Georgian | Vietnamese |
| Lao | Kirghiz | | Kirghiz | Vietnamese |
| Lao | Russian | | Latvian | Khmer |
| Lao | Hungarian | | Latvian | Lao |
| Malay | Russian | | Lithuanian | Vietnamese |
| Thai | Polish | | Lithuanian | Khmer |
| Vietnamese | Russian | | Lithuanian | Lao |
| Vietnamese | Kazakh | | Nanai | Khmer |
| Vietnamese | Ukrainian | | Nanai | Lao |
| Vietnamese | Kirghiz | | Polish | Indonesian |
| Vietnamese | Latvian | | Russian | Malay |
| Vietnamese | Uzbek | | Russian | Vietnamese |
| Vietnamese | Moldavian | | Russian | Lao |
| Vietnamese | Czech | | Russian | Burmese |
| Vietnamese | Lithuanian | | Russian | Thai |
| Vietnamese | Hungarian | | Russian | Indonesian |
| Vietnamese | Polish | | Russian | Khmer |
| Vietnamese | Romanian | | SerboCroatian | Indonesian |
| Vietnamese | Belarusian | | Tatar | Vietnamese |
| Vietnamese | Georgian | | Turkmen | Vietnamese |
| Vietnamese | Macedonian | | Turkmen | Lao |
| Vietnamese | Slovak | | Ukrainian | Khmer |
| Vietnamese | Bulgarian | | Ukrainian | Lao |
| Vietnamese | Tajik | | Ukrainian | Vietnamese |
| Vietnamese | Bashkir | | | |
| Vietnamese | Turkmen | | | |

Southeast Asian and Eartern Bloc Language Pairs

Eastern Bloc and Southeast Asian Language Pairs

Today, the concept of "Third World" has generally been replaced in polite circles by the notion of the "Global South." Third Worldist perspectives strongly rooted in anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and class struggle have been rearticulated, with distinct tensions, into the contemporary Southern idioms of inequality, social exclusion, and ecological crises. It is well known that these matters of great urgency can no longer realistically be addressed on a merely national level. Thus, these common concerns which bind the peoples of the Global South together logically implies that the formation of Southern literary capitals cannot simply be left to the mercy of blind market forces. To have any relevance or meaning at all, the basis of these literary capitals must become political. It must become as political as Third World literature once was. It must include the struggles of indigenous and marginalized peoples facing widespread mining and logging operations, massive dam construction, palm oil plantations, and the militarization and genocide which come in their wake. It must include the voices of millions of migrant workers living in the interstices of the megacities who daily experience exploitation, indignity, racism, and gender oppression. Moreover, the very notions of North and South results in a complexification in the ideas of center and periphery. Instead of situating the so-called centers exclusively in the North and placing the peripheries in the South, there is the recognition that the North and the South both have centers and peripheries. This complexification further leads to a greater polycentricity and polylinguicity in the notion of global literary capitals.

The development of literary capitals of the South in both the North and the South may eventually give rise to a "Southern literary canon." To be viable, these capitals must possess progressive multilingual intelligentsia and competent translators and publishers. Looking at the Southeast Asian case, this eventuality is made much more difficult by the fact that during the whole period during and after the Cold War, there have essentially been no substantial processes of linguistic inter-translation within Southeast Asia. English has remained the main, if not exclusive, language of mediation, or alienation, among countries in the region. Given its historical and geopolitical importance as well as translational vitality and publishing verve, perhaps Jakarta can play a role in the future as a capital of Southeast Asian literature if not of Southern literature as a whole. One also cannot minimize the fundamental role of global political and economic power relations and the intensity of the struggles of the peoples of the South in the development of the cultural, linguistic, and literary infrastructure necessary for the development of these Southern literary capitals. One should therefore speak, among other things, of a certain kind of cosmopolitanism from below. All these are just preconditions for the precarious future development of what may lead to the rise of a genuinely internationalist Southern literary canon.

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transmission, dissemination, reception, and translation of radical texts and ideas in Southeast Asia using techniques and approaches from translation studies and digital humanities. He is the author of several books which include "Translation and Revolution: A Study of Jose Rizal's Guillermo Tell" (Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2009), "Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw" (Site and Standpoint: A Critique of Pantayong Pananaw) (UP Press, 2009) and the novel "Ang Makina ni Mang Turing" (Mister Turing's Machine) (UP Press, 2013). He was the Faculty Regent of the University of the Philippines from 2019 to 2020. He is one of the initiators of the Network in Defense of Historical Truth and Academic Freedom.

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