

Open Books Hong Kong: Multilingualism and Bibliodiversity

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Abstract:

Open Books Hong Kong (OBHK) is an innovative pilot project aimed at transforming the dissemination of academic monographs in Chinese. This initiative provides free access to high-quality research books from three university presses. By making 36 titles available for free online, OBHK ensures that anyone with an internet connection can access these valuable resources. The project emphasizes multilingualism and bibliodiversity, showcasing monographs primarily in Chinese, which is under-represented in Open Access (OA) research books. This approach not only democratizes access to knowledge but also promotes the diversity of scholarly communication, ensuring that research from different linguistic backgrounds is accessible globally.

Challenges and Sustainability

OA publishing in Hong Kong and China faces several challenges, including the need for robust infrastructure, and the difficulty of developing a long-term sustainable plan. The lack of OA outlets for Chinese monographs does a disservice to outstanding researchers who publish in Chinese. OBHK addresses this gap by publishing all titles with a Creative Commons license, granting the right to share content with attribution to the author. Despite the modest scale of the initial pilot, the ambition is to establish a sustainable approach to exposing the research of Hong Kong universities.

Since its launch in July 2024, OBHK has garnered over 430,000 views from 170,000 visitors. The initiative has expanded its collection to include 36

monographs showcasing the high-calibre research published by Hong Kong's university presses. The most popular book, "People's West Lake," was viewed over 27,000 times.

Open Books Hong Kong exemplifies the potential of Open Access to democratize knowledge and foster global academic collaboration. By prioritizing multilingualism and bibliodiversity, OBHK serves as a model for other regions and contributes to the broader goals of the IFLA Open Science and Scholarship Advisory Committee.

Keywords: Open Access Publishing, Open Books Hong Kong (OBHK), Monographs, Multilingualism, Bibliodiversity

Introduction

Open Books Hong Kong (OBHK) is a pioneering initiative designed to transform the landscape of academic monograph dissemination in Chinese. As scholarly communication increasingly embraces Open Access (OA), the project addresses a critical gap: the underrepresentation of Chinese-language academic books in OA publishing. By offering free access to high-quality research books through collaboration among three university presses, OBHK ensures that knowledge is accessible to anyone with an internet connection, regardless of geographical or financial barriers.

This paper explores the contributions of OBHK to multilingualism, bibliodiversity, and the democratization of knowledge. It highlights the challenges faced in creating a sustainable OA publishing ecosystem for Chinese monographs and examines the project's successes in its first year of operation.

The Evolving Landscape of Open Access Publishing for Chinese Monographs

The landscape of OA publishing for Chinese-language monographs has evolved significantly in recent years, reflecting a growing focus on transparency in research dissemination while navigating the complexities of cultural and institutional contexts. The transition toward OA models in China aligns with broader global trends but also encounters unique local challenges.

OA publishing in China presents a dual narrative of grassroots activism and institutional support. Early-career researchers often demonstrate a positive attitude toward OA, recognizing its potential to enhance the dissemination and visibility of their work. However, the uptake of OA publishing remains heavily influenced by institutional evaluation systems and the perceived reputation of OA journals and monographs. Studies have shown that while younger

academics are generally supportive of OA and open data, they often require institutional incentives to actively participate in OA initiatives. This reflects a broader pattern in which monetary or reputational rewards play a critical role in shaping scholarly publishing behaviors in China (Xu et al., 2020).

Scholarly communication in China is further influenced by a combination of top-down policy directives and grassroots movements advocating for open knowledge. Government-led efforts, such as the establishment of national-level repositories and OA journals, demonstrate an institutional commitment to democratizing access to research outputs (Montgomery & Ren, 2018). However, many journal editors in China remain reluctant to transition to OA models, citing the need for substantial reforms in the academic publishing ecosystem (Fu et al., 2023; Montgomery & Ren, 2018). This reluctance extends to OA monographs, which serve as essential outputs in the Humanities and Social Sciences, where traditional publishing practices still dominate (Snijder, 2019; Montgomery et al., 2018).

In addition, innovative funding models are beginning to shape the future of OA monograph publishing. Collaborative initiatives such as Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem (TOME) aim to establish sustainable pathways for OA monographs by integrating comprehensive funding frameworks that support diverse academic contributions (Maron & Potter, 2023; Laird, 2024). These funding approaches may hold potential for the Chinese OA monograph landscape, particularly if they are adapted to local publishing practices and institutional structures (Eve et al., 2022).

Despite these advancements, challenges remain. The sustainability of OA models and the economic viability of funding initiatives specifically tailored to monographs continue to be pressing concerns (Eve et al., 2022; Fathallah, 2022). Furthermore, the motivations for publishing OA in China are often tied to external factors, such as academic assessments, rather than intrinsic scholarly values, which limits the organic adoption of OA practices (Bramstedt & Xu, 2019). Authors are also hesitant to embrace OA formats due to concerns over perceived quality, with many scholars preferring traditional, closed-access models that remain prevalent in Chinese academic circles (Fu et al., 2023; Bramstedt & Xu, 2019).

Multilingualism and Bibliodiversity in Scholarly Communication

UNESCO (2021) calls on member states to promote a shared understanding of open science, and to respect diversity in languages and perspectives of different research systems. Out of 95,000 OA books indexed in the Directory of OA Books (DOAB), there are 22 Chinese books (DOAB, 2025). The OBHK initiative stands out for its commitment to multilingualism and bibliodiversity, particularly by focusing on Chinese-language publications: with 0.023% of titles listed in DOAB, Chinese is underrepresented in the OA monograph landscape. This approach not only democratizes access to knowledge but also significantly

enriches the global research ecosystem by amplifying voices that are often marginalized in traditional publishing systems.

OBHK currently offers 36 titles, authored by prominent scholars from Hong Kong universities, covering disciplines like Humanities and Social Sciences. By prioritizing Chinese, OBHK ensures that research from different linguistic and cultural contexts becomes accessible to a global audience, thereby reinforcing the importance of linguistic diversity in scholarly communication (Berger, 2021; Shearer & Becerril-García, 2021).

Bibliodiversity is defined as the variety of publishing models, platforms, and formats available for scholarly communication. This diversity is essential for fostering an academic ecosystem that includes various languages and cultural perspectives, thereby reflecting the multifaceted nature of global knowledge production (Walsh et al., 2024). The inclusion of multiple languages in scholarly publications enhances accessibility for non-English-speaking scholars and enriches academic discourse with diverse viewpoints often overlooked in an English-centric environment (Shearer & Becerril-García, 2021). It also challenges the dominance of major languages in academia, promoting a more inclusive publishing landscape that values contributions from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Bardiau & Dony, 2024).

By embracing multilingualism, OBHK and similar initiatives play a crucial role in combatting the marginalization of global voices and redefining academic success metrics that currently favour English-language publications (Berger, 2021). This shift towards a more bibliodiverse approach helps in promoting equity in scholarly recognition and career advancement, enhancing the overall quality and richness of academic discourse (Walsh et al., 2024).

OBHK's emphasis on publishing in Chinese and promoting bibliodiversity contributes to a more inclusive and effective dissemination of knowledge. This strategy not only supports linguistic diversity but also challenges the existing norms in scholarly communication, advocating for a system where knowledge is accessible and valuable regardless of the language it is presented in.

Challenges in Open Access Publishing for Chinese Monographs

OBHK has been pioneering in its approach to multilingualism and bibliodiversity, particularly by focusing on Chinese-language publications in OA monographs. Despite its successes, OBHK encounters several challenges that are emblematic of broader issues within the OA movement, especially in regions like Hong Kong and China. These challenges are multifaceted and include infrastructure needs, financial sustainability and narrow range of options for authors and libraries to draw from.

Infrastructure Needs

A robust technical infrastructure is essential for hosting, disseminating, and preserving OA monographs. However, many OA projects, including OBHK, struggle with the costs and expertise required to develop and maintain such infrastructure. In China, where traditional subscription models are still predominant, the transition to OA is complicated by the lack of mature systems for publishing OA monographs. This underdevelopment can hinder the effective distribution and long-term preservation of digital scholarly content (Basson et al., 2022; Giménez-Toledo et al., 2022).

Sustainability

Financial sustainability poses a significant hurdle for OA publishing. Models like Gold OA which rely on authors to bear the costs of publishing through Article Processing Charges (APCs) and Book Processing Charges (BPCs) can be prohibitive, especially for researchers in the Global South or in less-funded disciplines like Humanities and Social Sciences. While OBHK seeks to make scholarly content freely accessible, the financial models supporting OA need to be both sustainable and equitable. Initiatives like the COPIM project highlight the need for new funding processes tailored to support smaller presses, indicating a significant gap in current support for OA publishing (Fathallah, 2022). The TOME initiative also underscores the ongoing challenge of securing sustainable funding for OA monographs (Maron & Potter, 2023).

Limited OA Outlets

The scarcity of OA outlets specifically for Chinese monographs limits the visibility and dissemination of Chinese-language academic work. This lack of options not only restricts the reach of groundbreaking research but also perpetuates inequities in scholarly communication (Gandy, 2023). The dominance of large, for-profit publishers in the publishing landscape is another inhibitor in the growth of a more diverse ecosystem necessary for monographs. OBHK provides one avenue, demonstrating the opportunity for university presses and research libraries to collaborate and tackle this challenge, at a local or national level. Limited institutional commitments to OA efforts exacerbate this issue, as support for alternative publishing models is often inadequate (Montgomery et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2019; Maryl et al., 2020; Cousijn et al., 2021). However, there is potential for academic libraries to use their agency and establish new pathways for disseminating OA content. If scaled up to the entire research library system, could radically re-frame the conversation.

Future Directions and Broader Implications

Looking ahead, establishing a long-term sustainable model for OA publishing is pivotal for enhancing research accessibility and equity both locally and globally. For OBHK, this involves focusing on three key priorities: expanding the collection, sustainability planning, and fostering global collaboration. These efforts not only aim to solidify OBHK's role as a leader in multilingual OA publishing but also contribute to the broader global movement for equitable and diverse scholarly communication. For Chinese libraries, this aligns strongly with the policy laid out by the government of China of cooperating in Open Science to benefit the Global South through greater access to global advances in science and innovation (Xi, 2024).

Expanding the Collection

OBHK plans to increase the number of titles published annually, broadening access to high-quality Chinese-language scholarship. Expanding OA collections is critical, as disparities in OA accessibility exist across disciplines and regions. Scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences face greater challenges in publishing OA works compared to those in the Natural Sciences, which benefit from more collaborative funding opportunities and a wider range of established journals. Research indicates that the Humanities have fewer OA journal options and often favour monographs over journals (Zhu, 2017). Addressing these disparities requires a diverse array of OA resources and initiatives that encourage the transformation of subscription journals into OA journals (Schiltz, 2018; Haux et al., 2016). For instance, the "Trans-O-MIM" project demonstrates how subscription-based journals can successfully transition to OA models, significantly enhancing the collection and diversifying the types of available works (Kuballa, 2017). Furthermore, multi-national policies, such as Plan S, emphasize that publicly funded research should meet OA requirements, underscoring the role of government support in building a comprehensive OA framework (Schiltz, 2018; Laner, 2021). For OBHK, another avenue to expand the range of titles is to explore partnership with research-intensive institutions in mainland China. This would support a wider agenda of Open Science and maximising the reach of high-quality research from institutions to benefit as many people and optimise the return on investment from publicly-funded research generated in China.

Sustainability Planning

Sustainability in OA publishing hinges on the development of economic models that ensure consistent funding while minimizing barriers for authors, particularly those from underrepresented or marginalized backgrounds. Collaborative funding models will be explored by OBHK, including government support and institutional contributions. One effective approach is the implementation of cooperative models for scholarly publishing that pool

resources, making publishing more financially accessible (Jiménez et al., 2015; Adema & Moore, 2018). Cooperative governance structures can prioritize community needs over profit, thereby enhancing the sustainability of OA initiatives. Community-based funding mechanisms, such as the Open Access eXchange (OAeX), also serve as effective tools for connecting funders with scholarly projects, alleviating financial burdens on authors (Hyland et al., 2020). Additionally, alternative funding channels or institutional support systems must be explored to reduce the financial impact of Article Processing Charges (APCs) on authors (Yesantharao et al., 2022). In Hong Kong, ongoing advocacy will be essential to ensure higher education leaders and funders can support the transition towards new ways of managing monograph publication as a means to improve financial control and to increase global reach and impact.

Global Collaboration

Global collaboration is critical to ensuring that OA initiatives represent diverse voices in scholarly dialogue. OBHK has already taken steps in this direction by collaborating with the National Science Library of the China Academy of Sciences (CAS-NSL) to ensure indexing in their open infrastructure, PubScholar. Moving forward, OBHK will continue engaging with international initiatives, such as the IFLA Open Science and Scholarship Advisory Committee, to promote best practices and foster academic collaboration across borders. International coalitions that unite diverse stakeholders including libraries, universities, and research funders are essential for sharing resources and knowledge (Hoops & Hare, 2019). For example, the Radical Open Access Collective demonstrates how community-driven collaboration can create a resilient scholarly infrastructure (Adema & Moore, 2018). Inspiration can also be drawn from innovative models in Latin America, where unique challenges have led to equitable and impactful approaches to OA publishing (Moore, 2021; Berger, 2021). Supporting scholar-led initiatives is equally important, as they empower researchers at the periphery to produce and disseminate local knowledge, granting greater agency to marginalized voices in the academic community (Ma et al., 2023).

Conclusion

OBHK exemplifies the transformative potential of OA publishing to democratize knowledge, promote multilingualism, and foster bibliodiversity. By prioritizing Chinese-language monographs, OBHK addresses the historical underrepresentation of non-English scholarly works in the OA landscape and offers a model for inclusive and equitable dissemination of knowledge.

Despite its successes, OBHK faces challenges that are emblematic of broader issues in OA publishing, including the need for robust infrastructure, financial sustainability, and an increased number of OA outlets for Chinese monographs. These challenges are compounded by systemic issues in

scholarly communication, such as reliance on traditional publishing models, concerns over perceived quality, and the influence of institutional evaluation systems.

Looking ahead, OBHK's commitment to expanding its collection, developing sustainable funding models, and fostering global collaboration positions it as a leader in the OA movement, both regionally and globally. By tackling these challenges, OBHK not only enriches the academic ecosystem but also challenges existing norms in scholarly communication, advocating for a future where knowledge is accessible and valued regardless of its language or origin.

OBHK's emphasis on multilingualism and bibliodiversity serves as a call to action for other regions and institutions to adopt similar approaches. Through collaborative efforts and innovative strategies, the global OA movement can become more inclusive, ensuring that the academic voices of all cultures and languages are heard. As OBHK continues to grow, it will play a crucial role in reshaping the scholarly publishing landscape, contributing to a more equitable and diverse academic future.

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