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A study of book reviews in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI journals by researchers from five countries: 2006–2015

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Abstract This article reports a study on the publications of book reviews by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India. The Web of Science database was used to obtain the data concerning the publications of book reviews in SCI-Expanded, SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals from 2006 to 2015. Several results of interest were found. First, the results showed that the annual outputs of book reviews by researchers from Germany, Japan, China, and India increased significantly. Second, the number of book reviews contributed by researchers from Japan, China, and India is much lower than researchers from traditional scientific powers such as USA and Germany. Third, book reviews are published more in areas of social science and arts and humanities than in those of science and technology. Fourth, book reviews are much less cited than publications of other types are.

Keywords Book reviews · Web of Science · Research areas · Citation

Introduction

Most researchers seem often discouraged to write and publish book reviews (Obeng-Odoom 2014), probably due to the reason that book reviews play a role of "an Academic Cinderella" in academia (East 2011). Four points may explain book reviews' seemingly "second-class citizenship" of scholarly publication (e.g., Nicolaisen 2002; Riley and Spreitzer 1970; Young 1975). First, book reviews may be regarded as the reviewers' personal opinions rather than scientific contribution (e.g., Sabosik 1988). Accordingly, the scholarliness of book reviews may be challenged (e.g., Nicolaisen 2002). Second, book

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reviews are most of the time solicited by review editors, and dissimilar to research articles, do not go through the rigorous process of peer reviewing for quality control (Leo 2009; Oinas and Leppälä 2013). Third, probably due to the two foregoing points, book reviews received low citations (East 2011), which in turn may still downplay the role in scientific publication. Fourth, more practically, researchers do not benefit from writing and publishing book reviews for their academic assessment and career development (e.g., Obeng-Odoom 2014; Oinas and Leppälä 2013). For example, Obeng-Odoom (2014) states that book reviews are off the list of "weighted research publications" (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2008), which obviously serves as an evidence for the seemingly less "weighted" role that book reviews play for researchers' career development.

However, the significance or scholarliness of book reviews cannot be downplayed only because most researchers are reluctant to write them (Obeng-Odoom 2014; Oinas and Leppälä 2013; Nicolaisen 2002). In fact, many researchers argue for the crucial roles that book reviews play. For example, book reviews are serving "informative", "evaluative", and "reflective" purposes, and they are forums for serious discussion or debate on novel ideas (e.g., East 2011; Oinas and Leppälä 2013; Spink et al. 1998). In addition, Obeng-Odoom (2014) also argues for the benefits that researchers may gain while writing book reviews, such as boosting their own research, developing their skills of evaluation, and building reputation in an area. Some scholars also offer suggestions on how to write book reviews (e.g., Hartley 2006, 2010) and investigate the style change of book reviews as a genre across time (Hartley et al. 2016).

In the area of bibliometrics, many studies exclude book reviews from the data to be used in the studies (e.g., Leydesdorff and Wagner 2009; Liu et al. 2015), though some research include book reviews for the data analysis (e.g., Lei and Liao 2017). Such a case may also imply that many researchers in the area do not accept book reviews as significant academic publications. Probably as a result of it, book reviews have not attracted enough attention by researchers in the area, and bibliometric analysis on book reviews is scarce and underexplored as Liu et al. (2016) note.

Of the bibliometric studies on book reviews, Schubert et al. (1984) may be the first study that conducts bibliometric analysis on book reviews. The study finds that most book reviewers hold positive attitudes towards the books that they review, possibly due to the "visibility" or non-anonymity nature of the comments. The study also finds that the reviewers' attitudes towards a book are not correlated with the number of citations to the book.

Other studies on book reviews from the bibliometric perspective include Spink et al. (1998), a survey on researchers' attitudes and criteria of book reviews; Nicolaisen (2002) which proposes a bibliometric approach to examining the scholarliness of book reviews; Zuccala and Van Leeuwen (2011) that investigates the rates of both citations and co-citations of books with book reviews; and Gorraiz et al. (2014) which finds that books with book reviews would increase its number of citations.

Liu et al. (2016) is the study that is most pertinent to and motivates the present work. Liu et al. (2016) examines the publication of book reviews in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals from 2006 to 2015 in terms of the number of publications, research areas, and contributing countries. As for the number of publications, the study finds that the absolute numbers of book reviews published in SCI-Expanded journals across the examined period are stable, and they are less than 10% of that published in SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals. In addition, the relative numbers of book reviews published in the three indices have gone down across the time. Concerning the research areas, most

book reviews are published in areas of arts and humanities and social sciences, such as history and religion. As for the contributing countries, the work finds that developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada are leading and major contributors of book reviews. One of the most interesting point the authors find is that China, serving as a rising academic power (e.g., Liu et al. 2015; Zhou and Leydesdorff 2006), and Japan, another traditional academic power, have not contributed much to book reviews. Thus, the authors suggest that we explore the reasons why researchers from China and Japan publish a limited number of book reviews, which seems incomparable to their roles as academic powers.

The present study is primarily motivated by Liu et al.'s (2016) findings that China and Japan published a disproportionally low number of book reviews as well as their suggestion to examine China and Japan's contributions to book review. In this study, we intend to situate Liu et al.'s (2016) suggestion in a broader context. That is, we would explore the publications of book reviews by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India. We choose these five countries since USA, Germany, and Japan are traditional powerhouses of scientific research while China and India are newly emerging economies and academic powers (e.g., Liu et al. 2015; Zhou and Leydesdorff 2006). In addition, besides Liu et al.'s (2016) suggestion of Japan, we also choose Germany as our examined country because both Germany and Japan are non-native English speaking countries.

The present study is also motivated by our concerns of contributing our book reviews to SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals. As researchers in the area of applied linguistics, we have witnessed Chinese linguists' increasing interest in or "enthusiasm" of contributing book reviews as well as research articles to SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals. Therefore, it would be of interest to explore, in this study, what the most productive research areas, besides linguistics, for book reviews by researchers from China as well as those from other countries such as USA, Germany, Japan, and India.

Based on the motivations, the present study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the annual outputs of book reviews by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India from 2006 to 2015?
2. What are the research areas of book reviews by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India from 2006 to 2015?
3. How are the book reviews cited?

Methods

We used the Web of Science database to gain the data concerning the publications of book reviews in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals from 2006 to 2015 by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India. Three points should be noted here. First, we used the Web of Science database for the reason that it includes approximately 12,000 influential peer-reviewed SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals, which are widely used in bibliometric studies (e.g., Lei and Liao 2017; Liu et al. 2016; Yu et al. 2016). Second, we followed Liu et al. (2016) and chose the time span from 2006 to 2015, as such we could make more reasonable comparison between our findings with those of Liu et al. (2016). Third, as previously discussed, we examined book reviews

from the aforementioned five countries for the reason that USA, Germany, and Japan are traditional scientific powerhouses while China and India are emerging academic powers.

Three steps were employed for the data retrieval. First, we searched the "Address" as "USA", "Germany", "Japan", "China", and "India" from SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI databases. We set the time span as from 2006 to 2015. Then, we refined the "Document Types" to "Book review" from the preliminary results. Last, we followed Liu et al. (2016) and employed the online analysing function of the Web of Science database to obtain the results of annual outputs and research areas. We searched and gained the data from the Web of Science portal at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, China on March 10, 2017.

Concerning the citations of book reviews, we used the Citation Report of the Web of Science as the statistics of the citations the book reviews received.

Findings

In this section, we report the findings in terms of annual outputs, research areas, and citations of book reviews.

Annual outputs in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals

The absolute and relative annual outputs in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals are described in Table 1 and Fig. 1. Following Liu et al. (2016), the relative annual outputs were calculated by dividing the number of book reviews in a certain year by the number of all publications in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI databases in that year.

The results showed that the absolute annual outputs of book reviews by researchers from Germany, Japan, China, and India increased from 2006 to 2015, while that by researchers from USA remained stable (See Table 1 and Fig. 1a). Results of simple linear regression indicated that the absolute annual outputs from Germany, Japan, China, and India increased significantly [Germany: $F(1, 8) = 5.77$, $p = .04$; Japan: $F(1, 8) = 15.48$, $p = .00$; China: $F(1, 8) = 461.4$, $p = .00$; India: $F(1, 8) = 8.72$, $p = .02$], and that from USA did not change significantly [USA: $F(1, 8) = 0.08$, $p = .78$].

Two points are note-worthy here. First, USA and Germany were much more productive in terms of book review publication than the other three countries were. Second, of the four countries that gained significant increase in publications of book reviews (see Fig. 1b), it seemed that China has gained quick and steady increase (we will get back to the issue in the "Discussion" section).

Concerning the relative annual outputs of book reviews, it is obvious that the relative outputs by researchers from USA, Germany, and India significantly decreased [USA: $F(1, 8) = 31.95$, $p = .00$; Germany: $F(1, 8) = 6.99$, $p = .03$; India: $F(1, 8) = 13.45$, $p = .01$] and those from Japan and China significantly increased [Japan: $F(1, 8) = 12.84$, $p = .01$; China: $F(1, 8) = 6.82$, $p = .03$] (see Fig. 2).

It should be noted that the average number of China's output in the examined decade was much lower than those of other countries while the number of total outputs of China ranked second only to USA. The outputs discussed here included publications both in the disciplines of science and technology and in those of social science and arts and humanities. However, our hypothesis is that book reviews are particularly published in journals in disciplines of social science and arts and humanities, which would be evidenced by

Table 1 Annual outputs in SCI-Expanded, SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals

Year	USA			Germany			Japan			China			India		
	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)
2006	24,027	465,248	5.16	1427	100,175	1.42	112	95,082	0.12	94	93,485	0.10	167	31,668	0.53
2007	23,570	474,242	4.97	1310	106,839	1.23	149	92,463	0.16	127	101,933	0.12	150	36,946	0.41
2008	25,653	490,638	5.23	1408	110,825	1.27	159	93,217	0.17	156	119,080	0.13	164	43,483	0.38
2009	26,105	505,305	5.17	1478	115,219	1.28	181	94,851	0.19	171	136,086	0.13	187	44,887	0.42
2010	25,807	510,774	5.05	1337	117,117	1.14	204	93,729	0.22	235	151,491	0.16	156	48,231	0.32
2011	25,929	531,642	4.88	1668	123,318	1.35	204	94,897	0.21	243	175,689	0.14	196	52,532	0.37
2012	24,441	559,101	4.37	1512	127,987	1.18	176	97,585	0.18	284	202,554	0.14	161	55,881	0.29
2013	24,560	574,739	4.27	1595	132,008	1.21	231	99,686	0.23	350	240,347	0.15	176	62,205	0.28
2014	24,889	585,826	4.25	1529	134,163	1.14	196	98,898	0.20	382	275,165	0.14	212	67,499	0.31
2015	24,679	579,667	4.26	1545	135,838	1.14	207	94,834	0.22	429	306,163	0.14	239	69,687	0.34
Total	249,660	5,277,182	4.73	14,809	1,203,489	1.23	1819	955,242	0.19	2471	1,801,993	0.14	1808	513,019	0.35

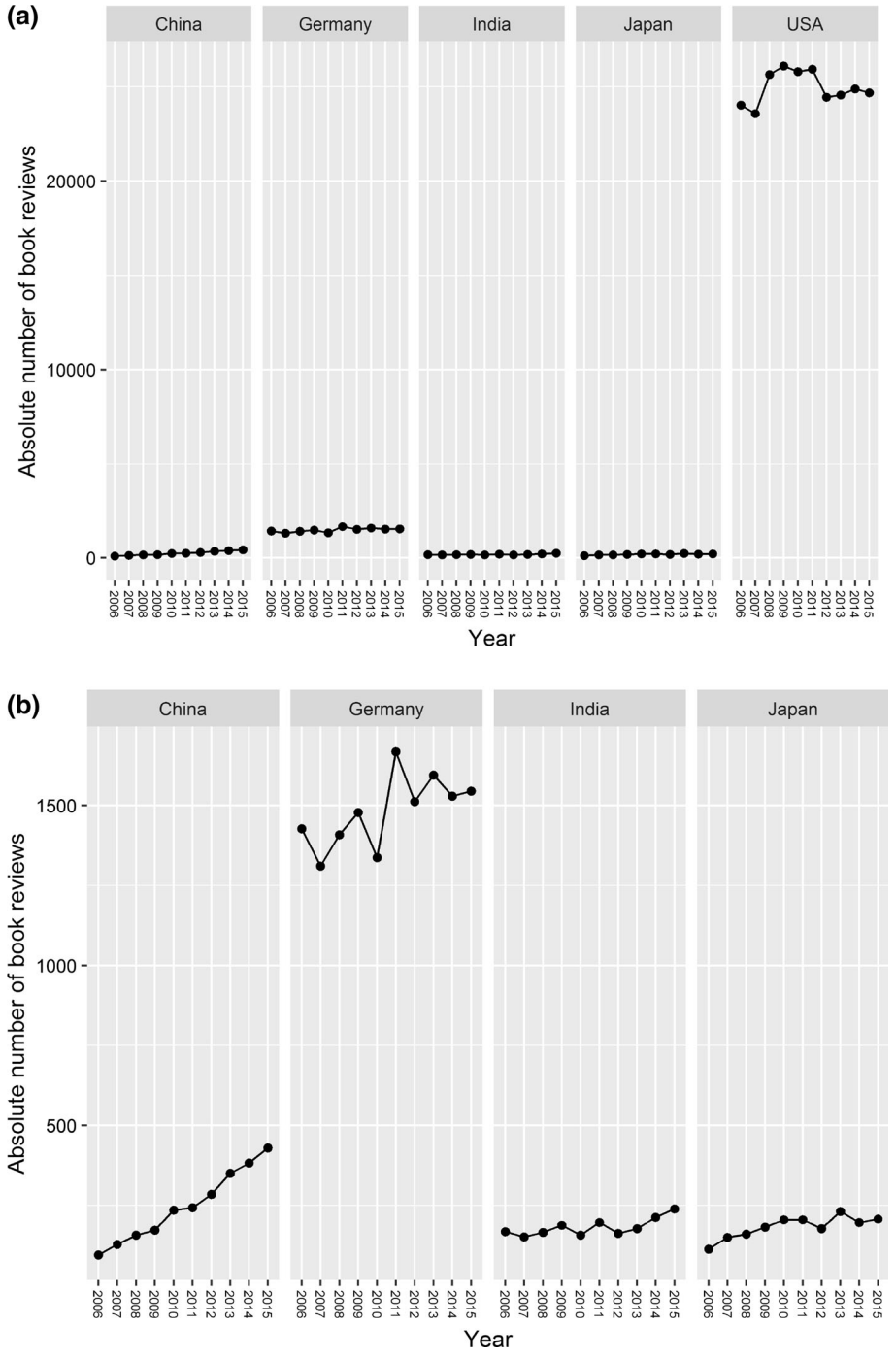

Fig. 1 Absolute annual outputs of book reviews in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals

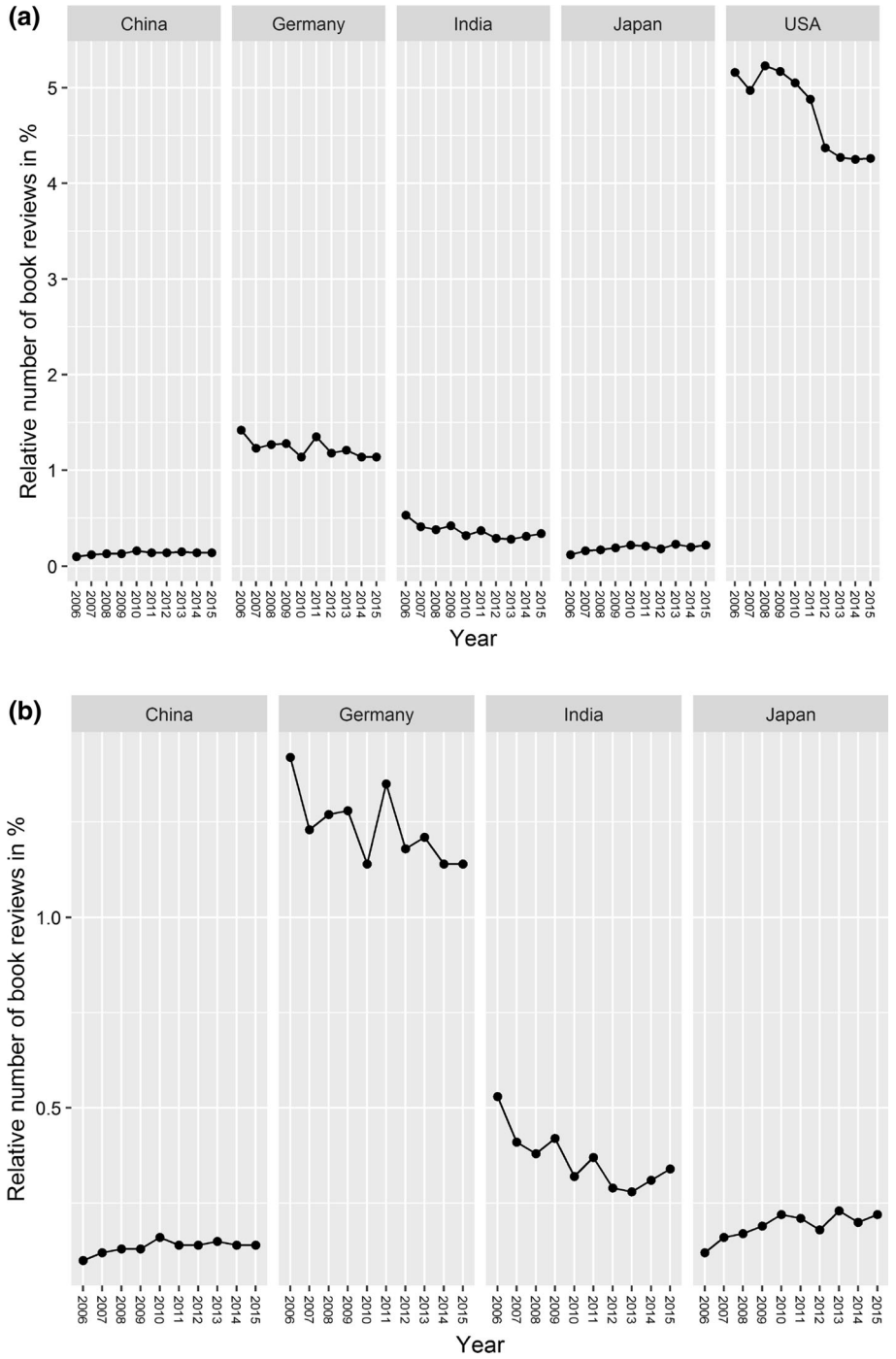

Fig. 2 Relative annual outputs of book reviews in SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals

findings of Liu et al. (2016) and by those presented in the section of research areas in the present study. Thus, it would be of interest and significance to explore only publications in disciplines of social science and arts and humanities. Such findings would offer a clearer picture of publications of book reviews from the five countries.

Annual outputs in SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals

The method to retrieve the data for this section was much similar to that described in the "Methods" section. The only difference was that we excluded the SCI-Expanded database, and searched only the SSCI and A&HCI databases. We did not calculate the SSCI and A&HCI databases separately for the reason that many journals were both listed in the SSCI and A&HCI databases. For example, we did a quick calculation and found that 383 of 1780 A&HCI journals are also included in the SSCI list. That is, separate calculations of the two databases would report overlapped and inaccurate results.

The findings of the annual outputs of the five countries in SSCI and A&HCI journals are described in Table 2. The results were similar to those reported in the previous section. That is, the absolute annual outputs of book reviews by researchers from Germany, Japan, China, and India increased from 2006 to 2015, while that by researchers from USA remained stable (see Table 2 and Fig. 3). Results of simple linear regression indicated that the absolute annual outputs from Germany, Japan, China, and India increased significantly [Germany: $F(1, 8) = 6.04$, $p = .04$; Japan: $F(1, 8) = 15.07$, $p = .00$; China: $F(1, 8) = 462.70$, $p = .00$; India: $F(1, 8) = 9.02$, $p = .02$], and that from USA did not change significantly [USA: $F(1, 8) = 0.08$, $p = .79$]. In addition, similar to the findings reported in the previous section, it was found that USA and Germany published more book reviews than the other three countries were. However, dissimilar to the previous findings, China was behind Germany in terms of the output of book reviews and the total output in social science and arts and humanities, though its output surpassed those of Japan and India and kept on increasing quickly.

The relative annual outputs of book reviews revealed that those of USA, Germany, China, and India decreased significantly [USA: $F(1, 8) = 331.60$, $p = .00$; Germany: $F(1, 8) = 39.63$, $p = .00$; China: $F(1, 8) = 12.55$, $p = .01$; India: $F(1, 8) = 71.40$, $p = .00$], that of Japan remained stable [$F(1, 8) = 4.33$, $p = .07$] (see Fig. 4). The results seemed to be closely related with the findings concerning the absolute annual outputs and the total outputs of the countries. That is, although the absolute annual outputs of the USA, Germany, China, and India increased, their total output also increased quickly. As a result, their relative annual outputs decreased. In contrast, although absolute annual outputs of Japan increased, its total output did not increase that quickly, which led to its steadiness of the relative annual output (see Fig. 5).

Research areas

The top 10 research areas of book reviews in terms of total number of book review publications by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India are listed in Table 3. One general finding from it was that the top research areas of the five countries were all ones in social science and arts and humanities, such as *History, Literature,* and *Area studies*. That is, none of research areas in science and technology was included in the top 10 research areas in these countries. The finding provided evidence to both Liu et al.'s (2016) finding and our hypothesis that book reviews are mostly published in social science and arts and humanities.

Table 2 Annual outputs in SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals

Year	USA			Germany			Japan			China			India		
	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)	Book reviews outputs	Total outputs	Book reviews relative outputs (%)
2006	23,926	93,726	25.53	1413	9197	15.36	112	2095	5.35	94	2314	4.06	162	943	17.18
2007	23,419	97,306	24.07	1306	9658	13.52	148	2591	5.71	126	2948	4.27	150	1006	14.91
2008	25,523	108,684	23.48	1399	12,826	10.91	158	3238	4.88	156	4513	3.46	163	1318	12.37
2009	26,038	116,276	22.39	1475	12,661	11.65	180	3201	5.62	170	5134	3.31	186	1555	11.96
2010	25,751	119,864	21.48	1331	13,535	9.83	204	3644	5.60	235	6206	3.79	156	1717	9.09
2011	25,831	124,928	20.68	1659	15,039	11.03	203	3737	5.43	243	7295	3.33	196	1944	10.08
2012	24,391	127,441	19.14	1510	16,052	9.41	176	4383	4.02	284	8980	3.16	160	2149	7.45
2013	24,453	132,401	18.47	1586	17,288	9.17	231	4402	5.25	349	10,067	3.47	172	2370	7.26
2014	24,741	134,353	18.41	1523	17,916	8.50	195	4588	4.25	381	11,984	3.18	212	2891	7.33
2015	24,548	137,391	17.87	1536	18,186	8.45	205	4363	4.70	429	13,698	3.13	233	3502	6.65
Total	248,621	1,192,370	20.85	14,738	142,358	10.35	1812	36,242	5.00	2467	73,139	3.37	1790	19,395	9.23

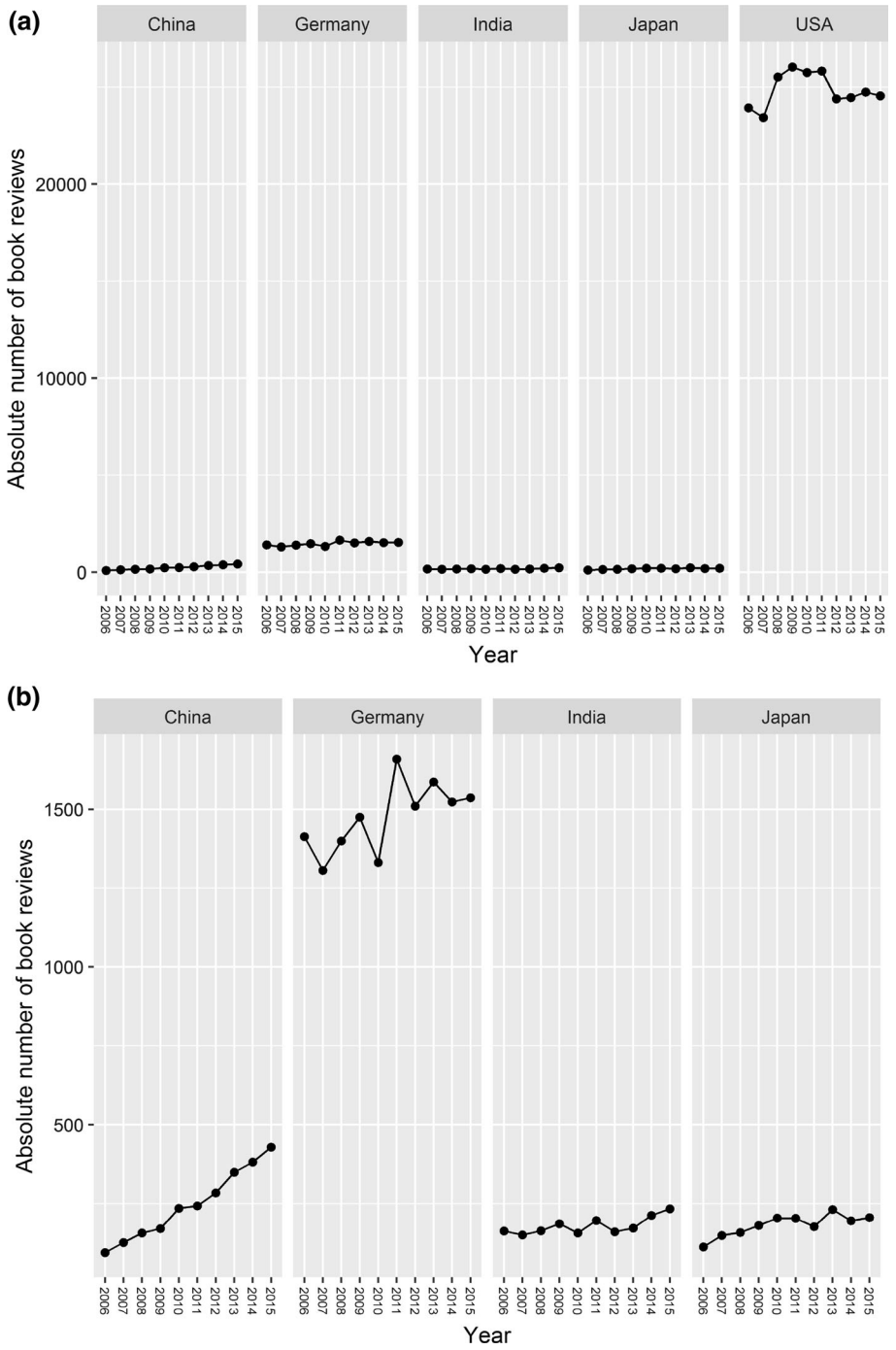

Fig. 3 Absolute annual outputs of book reviews in SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals

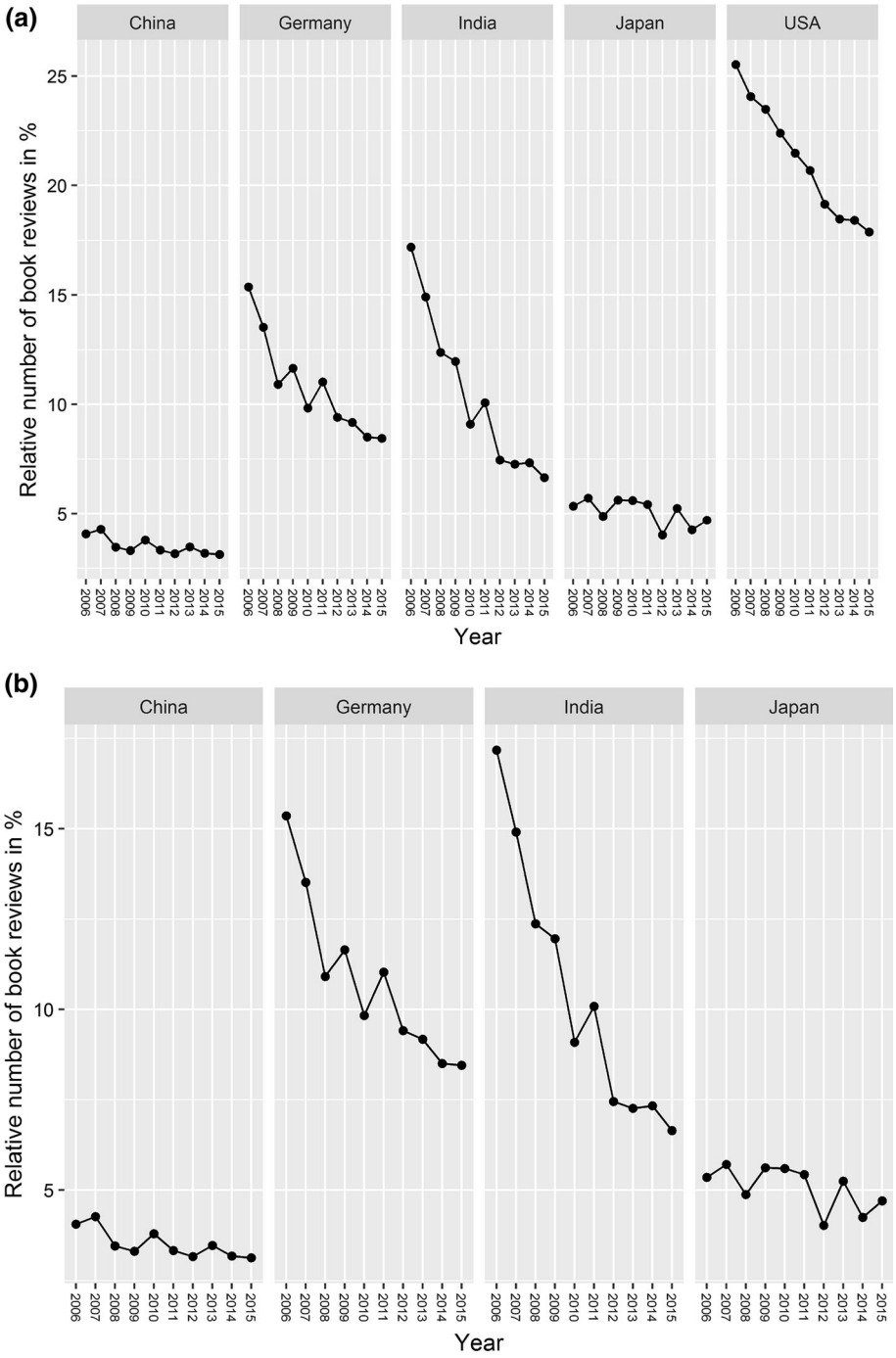

Fig. 4 Relative annual outputs of book reviews in SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals

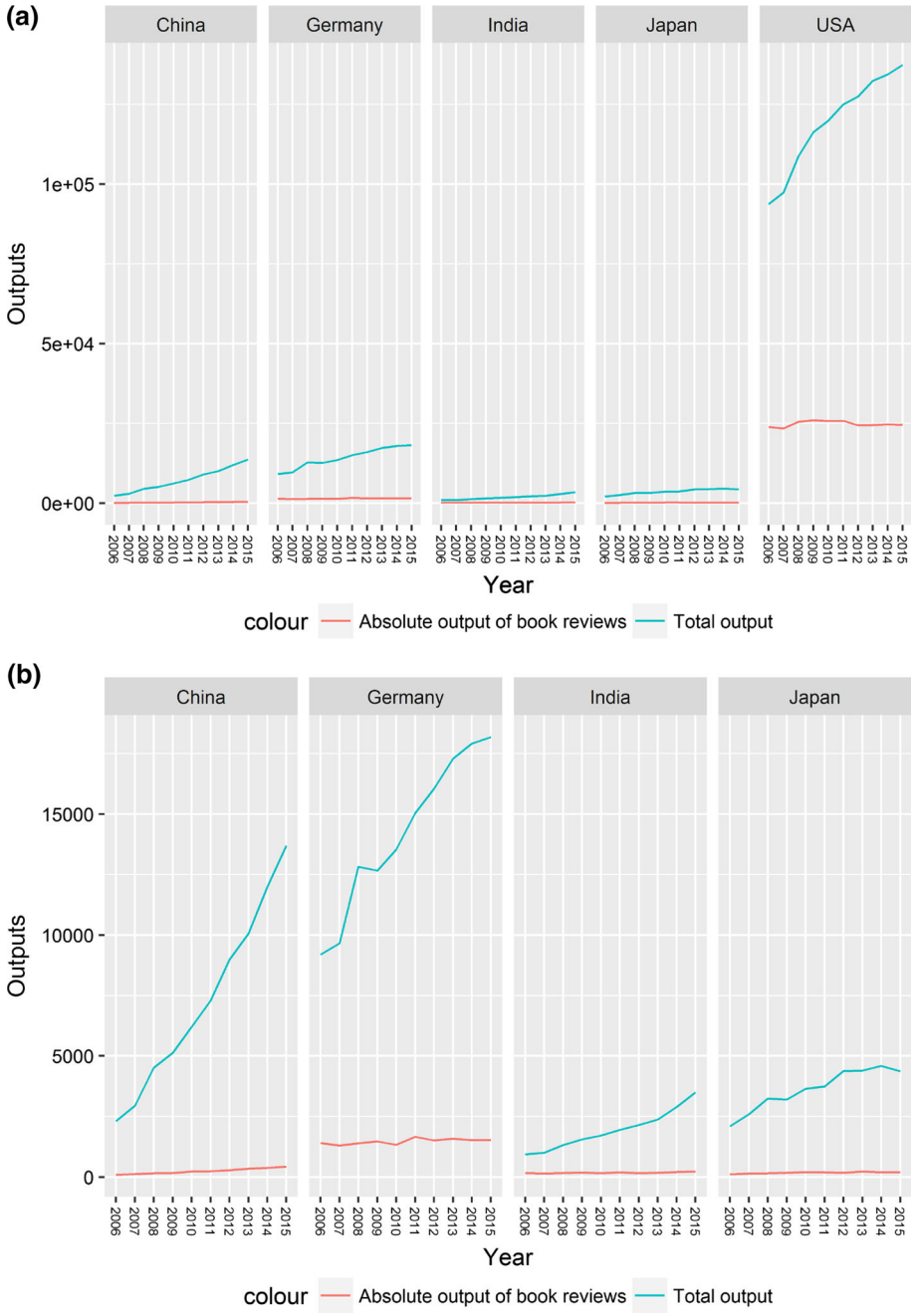

Fig. 5 Absolute annual outputs of book reviews versus total outputs in SSCI, and A&HCI indexed journals

Table 3 Top 10 research areas of book reviews of the five countries

	Research areas	Number of book reviews	Number of total publications in SCIE, SSCI and A&HCI	Relative number of book reviews (%)
USA				
1	History	60,024	77,959	76.99
2	Information science and library science	36,007	53,534	67.26
3	Literature	25,911	66,778	38.80
4	Arts humanities other topics	22,120	37,875	58.40
5	Religion	18,639	30,164	61.79
6	Government law	12,241	61,946	19.76
7	Area studies	10,767	16,913	63.66
8	Sociology	10,682	29,942	35.68
9	Business economics	8595	133,839	6.42
10	Social sciences other topics	7761	49,073	15.82
Germany				
1	Literature	2602	5957	43.68
2	History	2510	5316	47.22
3	Linguistics	1574	5298	29.71
4	Government law	1467	6735	21.78
5	Business economics	955	23,503	4.06
6	Arts humanities other topics	735	2174	33.81
7	Religion	726	2326	31.21
8	Philosophy	721	3176	22.70
9	Psychology	662	34,757	1.90
10	Education and educational research	606	4728	12.82
Japan				
1	Area studies	531	818	64.91
2	Asian studies	310	592	52.36
3	Social sciences other topics	295	1156	25.52
4	Business economics	189	6524	2.90
5	Religion	180	335	53.73
6	Philosophy	137	365	37.53
7	Linguistics	123	1200	10.25
8	History	122	369	33.06
9	Literature	106	470	22.55
10	Public administration	104	581	17.90
China				
1	Area studies	463	1582	29.27
2	Linguistics	457	2367	19.31
3	Communication	298	1076	27.70
4	Asian studies	215	1162	18.50

Table 3 continued

	Research areas	Number of book reviews	Number of total publications in SCIE, SSCI and A&HCI	Relative number of book reviews (%)
5	Sociology	198	1139	17.38
6	Government law	194	1593	12.18
7	History	146	543	26.89
8	Business economics	143	16,569	0.86
9	Education and educational research	123	3464	3.55
10	Literature	119	1819	6.54
India				
1	Sociology	319	513	62.18
2	History	314	508	61.81
3	Government law	168	663	25.34
4	Asian studies	161	475	33.89
5	Public administration	133	701	18.97
6	Business economics	126	3231	3.90
7	Women's studies	106	352	30.11
8	Arts humanities other topics	106	196	54.08
9	Area studies	72	245	29.39
10	Anthropology	64	849	7.54

Another finding of interest here was that most of the research areas were included in the top lists of book review publications for more than one country. To be specific, a total of 19 areas were found in the top lists, 14 of which were listed for at least two countries. Areas such as *History, Business economics, Literature, Government law, Area studies, Sociology, Religion, Linguistics, Asian studies,* and *Arts humanities other topics* were found in the top lists of at least three countries. Such a finding may indicate that some areas attracts researchers from a diversity of countries. More importantly, it may show that these areas particularly welcome book reviews.

Citations book reviews received

Based on the Citation Report from the Web of Science, the average citations per book review by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India[1] were 0.03, 0.04, 0.03, 0.05, and 0.03. For comparison purposes, we calculated the mean score of the 2015 impact factors of all SCI-Expanded and SSCI journals, which was 1.99, and that of only SSCI journals was 1.32. The results showed that the citations that the book reviews received

[1] Since the Web of Science cannot generate citation reports with more than 10,000 documents and the number of book review outputs from USA and Germany are more than 10,000, we used the following methods. For those from Germany, we grouped the book reviews by disciplines and retrieved twice, and averaged the two numbers of citations per item. For those from USA, since the total output was much larger than 10,000 (249,660 to be exact), we chose the year 2011 for demonstration purposes. Similar to the method for those from Germany, we averaged the three numbers of citations per item (25,929 items) in 2011.

were relatively low, which might serve as another reason for book reviews' status of "Academic Cinderella" in academia (East 2011) or "second-class citizenship" (e.g., Nicolaisen 2002; Riley and Spreitzer 1970; Young 1975).

Discussion

In this research, we studied the publication tendency of book reviews by researchers from USA, Germany, Japan, China, and India, and the top research areas of book review publications in these countries. Based on the results of the study, several points should be noted. First, the absolute outputs of book reviews in both the SCI-Expanded, SSCI, and A&HCI journals and the SSCI and A&HCI journals by researchers from Germany, Japan, China, and India showed a general increasing tendency across the examined span of 10 years. Interestingly, the relative outputs of book reviews in the SSCI and A&HCI journals by researchers from Germany, China, and India decreased (that from Japan remained unchanged). The proportion of book reviews in the total output of publications in social science and arts and humanities might indicate that though more book reviews by the researchers from these countries were published, their contributions of other publications such as articles also increased, or increased more rapidly. Another possible explanation, as one of the reviewers correctly pointed out, is that the total publication in the academia might also have gone up in the examined decade, which led to the increase in the numbers of both book reviews and total outputs of these countries. Since it may be a little off the point of this study, it may be of interest in future to explore the proportion of publications from these countries in the total publication of the world in the examined period.

Second, China's achievement seemed particularly remarkable amongst these countries since China was the only one that experienced significant but steady growth and, more importantly, China surpassed those of Japan, a traditional scientific powerhouse, in 2010 in terms of book review output and kept on increasing quickly from then on. China's rise as a research power, i.e. China has surpassed traditional scientific powers such as Japan, has already been recognised by many studies such as Leydesdorff (2005), Zhou and Leydesdorff (2006), Leydesdorff and Wagner (2009), and Moiwo and Tao (2013). Such a case may be explained by China's rapid development in economy (Barboza 2010), and accordingly its increase of investment in scientific research (e.g., Yip and McKern 2014). As Lei and Liao (2017) optimistically predict, China may sustain or accelerate its "exponential growth" (Leydesdorff and Wagner 2009) after its initiation of a series of programmes to boost its development of world-class universities and disciplines (State Council 2015; Zhang et al. 2013). Thus, it is understandable that China has surpassed Japan in terms of both book reviews and total publications in SCI-Expanded, SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals.

Third, the number of book reviews contributed by researchers from Japan, China, and India is much lower than researchers from traditional scientific powers such as USA and Germany. Liu et al. (2016) suggested two reasons for it. The first reason may be that researchers from the countries have contributed only a limited part of the total publications in SSCI and A&HCI indexed journals. The second reason might be that the postgraduate students (as well as professional researchers, we believe) have not received enough training on how to write book reviews. Thus, they should be taught and encouraged to write book reviews, since books are still important communicative tools in academia.

While we accept Liu et al.'s (2016) aforementioned suggestions, we may discuss it from the following three points (we owe parts of the following discussion to the reviewers). First, the research systems may be much different in the examined countries. Compared with traditional powerhouses such as the USA and Germany, upcoming countries such as China and India, albeit their enormously increased investment in scientific research (e.g., Leydesdorff and Wagner 2009; Yip and McKern 2014), have invested much less in social science and arts and humanities than in science and technology. For example, the spending in basic research in China only explains 5% of its R&D investment, while its most funding goes to technology (van Noorden 2016). This may explain why China's and India's total publications and publications of book review in social science and arts and humanities are much lower than those in the USA and Germany. Second, one obvious but significant nature of book reviews, different from other document types of academic journals such as research articles and letters, is that some journals only accept solicited book reviews. That is, the book review editors would solicit or invite candidate reviewers of books they receive from publishing houses or they select to write reviews (Obeng-Odoom 2014; Oinas and Leppälä 2013). Chances are that the book review editors may invite candidate reviewers that are experts in some themes or thematic areas. Thus, more outputs of book reviews from USA and Germany may provide evidence to their research power, particularly in social science and arts and humanities, in comparison to countries such as Japan, China, and India. The foregoing argument could also be supported by the much larger total outputs in social science and arts and humanities from USA and Germany. Last, some journals also accept submissions of book reviews from researchers without invitation. In such cases, the publications of book reviews may indicate individual researchers' interest in or attention to certain books they are reviewing. As one of the reviewers pointed out, it may need a study in future to explore the proportion of solicited or freely submitted book reviews for more accurate explanations of the findings.

Fourth, although book reviews have been less weighted than other types of publications such as research articles and letters (e.g., Obeng-Odoom 2014) for various reasons such as its relatively low citations as found in the present study, its importance could not be downplayed in some areas where books play a very important role of knowledge communication (Liu et al. 2016). It would be particularly true when we consider areas such as *History*, as evidenced in the present study, where the proportion of book reviews were very high (from more than one quarter in China to more than three quarters in USA).

Last, two points need to be discussed concerning the database issue. The first point is that some may argue for the use of other databases such as Google Scholar to retrieve the data. While the Web of Science may not include as many journals in social science and arts and humanities as Google Scholar does, it has its merit in that it includes only "quality" journals. In contrast, although Google Scholar includes much more journals, the journals may not be all "quality" ones. In addition, Google Scholar does not provide any portal as user-friendly as the Web of Science is to download the information for bibliometric analysis purposes. Another point concerning the database issue is that the Web of Science includes mostly English journals, while there must exist journals that publish book reviews in other languages. To address the two points, research is needed to examine the publication of book reviews with other databases that include more journals and journals published in other languages.

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