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TREASURES AND TRIVIA: THE UNIVERSE OF MICROFILMED DISSERTATIONS ON EAST ASIA AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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The twenty years between 1955 and 1975 stand out as a period of unprecedented growth in American higher education, particularly on the graduate level. During those two decades, the annual number of dissertations completed at universities in the United States and Canada quadrupled from 8,812 to 34,812. A total of 402,786 theses were successfully defended for the doctoral degree at that time, and an additional 262,306 doctorates were awarded between 1976 and 1983, the latest year for which published data are currently available. Even though various developments in American society, among them dramatic changes in career opportunities, have recently reduced enrollments in many academic programs, approximately 30,000-32,000 dissertations are still being accepted each year by American and Canadian institutions.

The problem of insuring adequate bibliographical control over American dissertation research was to some extent addressed and resolved in the early 1930s with the appearance of the first annual volume of Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities. The difficulties involved in obtaining copies of the dissertation typescripts themselves, however, continued to hamper the work of serious researchers for a much longer period of time. Before World War II, many American theses went virtually unread because they were neither published nor readily available through interlibrary loan. Then in 1938 Eugene R. Power inaugurated a new era in scholarly publishing with the establishment in Ann Arbor, Michigan of University Microfilms (subsequently renamed University Microfilms International [UMI]) to film for both commercial and preservation purposes as many new dissertations as could be acquired. Participation in the UMI program at first was very limited. Many major universities such as Columbia, Michigan, Illinois, Cornell and Pennsylvania joined the UMI program by the late 1950s, however, and by the early 1970s, over eighty percent of all American dissertations were routinely being sent to Ann Arbor for filming. The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University, one of the last major "holdouts", began to participate fully in 1982.

Today, with the principal exception of several theological institutes and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, most higher degree awarding institutions in the United States (over 400 in number) participate in some fashion in the UMI cooperative microfilming and abstracting program. Graduate school across the country routinely have the thesis typescripts of their degree recipients shipped to Ann Arbor within six to nine months of their formal acceptance. There master negatives are produced, are assigned unique order numbers, and are stored in temperature and humidity controlled vaults. As orders arrive from individual and institutional customers, xerographic ("xerox"), microfilm and microfiche copies of the dissertation typescripts are produced for worldwide distribution. At the same time, 350-600 word summaries of the dissertations, written by the thesis authors, are compiled and edited by the UMI staff for publication in the monthly issues of Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI). Known as Dissertation Abstracts before July 1969 and as Microfilm Abstracts from 1938 through 1951, each annual volume contains well over 25,000 summaries. DAI currently appears in three sections:
"Humanities and Social Sciences" (A); "Sciences and Engineering" (B); and "European Abstracts" (C). Because of its significant reference value, sets of DAI may be found in the collections of most North American college and university libraries and in many academic institutions overseas.

Certain institutions, however, have chosen to limit their participation in the UMI program. The Universities of Chicago, Hawaii (for up to half of its theses) and Southern California, for example, maintain their own photoreproduction facilities and retain sole distribution rights over the dissertations submitted by their degree candidates. Nevertheless, abstracts for many of those theses also routinely appear in the monthly issues of DAI. In the case of Canadian universities, these summaries are frequently published in DAI within two years of graduation, but the filming and sales of Canadian dissertations are undertaken by the Canadian Theses on Microfiche Service at the National Library of Canada in Ottawa.

In view of the relative success of the UMI microfilming program, every research library in the United States today has the capability of acquiring very extensive holdings of dissertations, among them the thousands of theses known to have been written on East Asian subjects. The realities of acquisition budgets, cataloging and processing costs, and severe limitation of space, however, have resulted in highly selective purchasing by most libraries. Furthermore, despite widespread impressions to the contrary, University Microfilms International, as a commercial publisher, does not itself maintain in Ann Arbor any library containing copies of theses to which interested researchers may have ready access. Only the master negatives are housed at UMI, and they of course are used only for reproducing positive copies for sale. Nevertheless, there is one reasonably comprehensive collection of American doctoral dissertations available for longterm scholarly use: the microform holdings of the Library of Congress in Washington D.C.

The Library of Congress has actively acquired microforms since the early 1940s. A separate Microfilm Reading Room was established in 1953, and in 1972, it was renamed the Microform Reading Room [MicRR] to indicate that a variety of microforms comprise the collections. Over the years the MicRR holdings have grown rapidly to include a wide range of research materials: reproductions of rare books and out-of-print serial titles, collections of early state records and copies of current indexes and catalogs produced in microform directly from computer data bases. One of the most notable and more heavily used collections is the large body of doctoral dissertations acquired in microform from UMI and directly from certain American universities.

The U.S. Copyright Office in Washington, D.C., one of the seven major departments of the Library of Congress, automatically receives copies of all American imprints that are registered for copyright purposes. Included among these are microforms of the dissertations that UMI submits on behalf of a large number of authors. While not all of the monographs and periodicals received by the Copyright Office are added to its extensive holdings of research materials, the Library of Congress does endeavor, as a matter of policy, "to acquire for its permanent collections all doctoral dissertations submitted to universities in the U.S.,[and] whenever available, microfilms are preferred to other forms of publication." Accordingly, to fill in its holdings, the Library also maintains with UMI a standing subscription to all dissertations that are not copyrighted. Shipments numbering into the thousands of titles periodically arrive at the MicRR from both the Copyright Office and UMI in Ann Arbor. Upon their receipt the microforms are promptly shelved by UMI order number in closed stack areas adjacent to the MicRR. Until 1977 all newly acces-
sioned dissertations were on 35mm, positive microfilm. Most theses acquired since
then are in the form of ninety-eight page positive microfiche copies.

Some American dissertations not microfilmed by UMI are also acquired. Through its
Exchange and Gift Division, the Library of Congress receives most University of
Chicago theses, and microfilm copies of many University of Southern California
dissertations are obtained through the Copyright Office. In addition, foreign
dissertations dealing with the United States (e.g., on U.S.-Japanese relations) are
purchased for the Library's collections as part of an ongoing effort to develop and
maintain reasonably comprehensive holdings of materials relating to American
civilization and affairs. The Library of Congress does not normally acquire foreign
theses on other subjects (e.g., Swedish theses on Chinese linguistics, German
dissertations on Korean history, and Dutch theses on the Japanese economy),
however, unless they have been published commercially and can be handled as
scholarly monographs. Furthermore, since the early 1960s, the Library has tended
to send its accession of printed (as opposed to commercially published) foreign
dissertations to the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago, the major repository
in this country for both printed and microfilmed foreign dissertations.

While precise statistics are unavailable, it is clear that the Library of Congress
holdings of East Asia-related theses currently exceed 3,000 titles. They cover
virtually every important subject about which American scholars have written during
the past three decades: from works in Chinese archaeology, Korean sociology,
Japanese history and Ryukyuan anthropology, to studies in Tibetan religion, Mongol­
ian economics and East Asian foreign relations. The majority of these dissertations
focus on one East Asian country, but in the MicRR collections there are also theses
which deal only in part with that area of the world: cross-cultural and comparative
studies involving one or more East Asian civilization, essays on Western perceptions
of the region, research using East Asian data to test theoretical models, and works
about the interactions of East Asian and Western nations in both historical and
contemporary times. A growing body of theses about the Chinese, Japanese and
Korean ethnic communities in the West is also available. While up to twenty-five
percent of these dissertations subsequently appear in print as monographs, the
majority of them are unlikely ever to be commercially published except as journal
articles.

Two principal methods exist for identifying the Library of Congress microform
holdings of dissertations on China, Japan and Korea. Titles obviously dealing with
East Asia often can be found by laboriously checking through individual issues of
Dissertations Abstracts International or by searching UMI's Datrix II computerized
literature search system. Far more thorough and comprehensive coverage, of
foreign as well as American dissertations, is available in the subject-oriented
cumulative bibliographies on China, Japan and Korea by Frank Joseph Shulman as
well as in the annual volumes of Doctoral Dissertations on Asia: An Annotated
Bibliographical Journal of Current International Research. Because all microfilmed
dissertations available through UMI (regardless of their subject or discipline) are
already under some form of bibliographical control, each new Library of Congress
accession is processed and shelved without any formal cataloging. There are no
entries in the card catalog or in the Library's automated data bases, MUMS and
SCORPIO, and interested readers are expected to provide the MicRR staff with the
appropriate UMI order number (which concurrently serves as the MicRR call
number) at the time a dissertation is requested. Theses from the University of
Chicago and the University of Southern California (which lack UMI numbers)
receive minimal level cataloging at the Library of Congress and are assigned unique
MicRR call numbers. They may be located only by author and title in the MicRR
dictionary card catalog (for items cataloged before 1982) and in the MUMS and SCORPIO data bases (for more recent accessions).

The Microform Reading Room, room 140B, Thomas Jefferson Building, is open to the public on weekdays (8:30 a.m.-9:30 p.m.) as well as on weekends (Saturdays, 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.; Sundays, 1:00-5:00 p.m.). To gain access to a particular thesis, the reader completes a simple request form listing the items desired. Service is normally prompt, and knowledgeable library staff are happy to assist whenever problems occur with the handling of the microforms or with the use of microfilm and microfiche readers (including coin-operated reader printers). All dissertations must be read on the premises. Interlibrary loan service is provided only to Federal agency libraries such as the U.S. State Department Library for official business.

While some dissertations are of dubious quality and have little lasting academic value, researchers will nevertheless find the Library of Congress microform holdings of doctoral dissertations on East Asia to be a treasure trove of information, particularly in the case of those theses that have opened up new areas of scholarly inquiry or that provide the only detailed English-language information available about a particular subject. Trips to Washington, D.C. to use this collection, therefore, can be very rewarding for students and scholars. At the same time, individuals planning to avail themselves of the MicRRR holdings should keep in mind certain problems relating to their use. First of all, for a variety of bureaucratic reasons (including delays at the Copyright Office and the failure of UMI to supply some of the non-copyrighted theses automatically on a standing order basis), there usually are delays in the Library's receipt of microfilmed dissertations. On the basis of several years of personal experience, I have found that up to one-third of the theses on East Asia are available within two months of the publication of their abstracts in Dissertation Abstracts International. Unfortunately, however, the remaining two-thirds take longer to be acquired and processed, not infrequently between six months and one year; and some are not even received until after two or three years have passed. Researchers anxious to read a particular thesis as soon as possible, therefore, may find it necessary to order a copy directly from UMI in Ann Arbor or through their home institution. Second, the MicRRR's holdings are generally limited to titles microfilmed by UMI, the University of Chicago, and the University of Southern California. Accordingly, as many as 1,000 dissertations dealing in whole or in large part with East Asia (e.g., from MIT dissertations, nearly all Harvard University theses prior to 1982, large numbers of University of California-Berkeley theses, and most American University dissertations completed before the late 1950s) that have never been filmed by UMI may never become available at the Library of Congress. Efforts are not currently being made to fill in these gaps or to acquire on microform copies of dissertations accepted by the University of Toronto, the University of British Columbia (each with major programs in East Asian Studies), and other Canadian institutions. Third, while the MicRR houses a complete set of Dissertation Abstracts International and Comprehensive Dissertation Index as well as copies of selected subject bibliographies (including a run of the journal Doctoral Dissertations on Asia), no specialized subject-oriented reference service is provided for people specifically interested in East Asia. Readers should therefore determine in advance which titles they will want to see if they are to make the most efficient use of their time. Finally, because loan copies of the theses do not exist, this unique collection of American dissertations is accessible only to people residing in or visiting the Washington, D.C. area.

In an era when even the largest university libraries are faced with the impossibility of satisfying all of their patrons' needs for research materials, the holdings of American doctoral dissertations at the Library of Congress constitute an invaluable
resource for the community of scholars interested in East Asia. They deserve to be much better known. It is encouraging to know that this collection will continue to grow indefinitely despite the budgetary cuts that are taking their toll elsewhere within the Library of Congress and at other academic institutions.

Further information about the Microform Reading Room can be obtained from the brochure "Microform Reading Room in the Library of Congress" and by contacting the MicRR staff directly:

Microform Reading Room  
Room 140 Thomas Jefferson Building  
Library of Congress  
Washington, D.C. 20540  
TEL: (202) 287-5471

Alan Solomon, Head  
Robert Costenbader, Assistant Head

NOTES

1. See the statistical tables at the beginning of the annual volumes of American Doctoral Dissertations, compiled for the Association for Research Libraries by University Microfilms International in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

2. Volume 1, 1933/34, compiled for the Association of Research Libraries (New York: Wilson Company). Twenty-two volumes appeared between 1933/34 and 1954/55, when this title was succeeded by the Index to American Doctoral Dissertations (1955-56-1963/64) and American Doctoral Dissertations (1964/65- ), compiled and published by University Microfilms International in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Doctoral Dissertations Accepted by American Universities was preceded by the annual volumes of the Library of Congress, Catalog Division's List of American Doctoral Dissertations Printed in [1912-1938] and published by the U.S. Government Printing Office in Washington, D.C., but this listing was limited to printed and published theses.


4. It should be noted, however, that dissertations accepted by certain other academic units of Harvard University, among them the Law School and the School of Public Health, are still not participating in the UMI program.

5. In this manner, all of the dissertations microfilmed by UMI are being kept in print indefinitely.

6. They are also cataloged and listed in the monthly issues and annual volumes of Canadiana, the national bibliography of Canada, and they must be ordered directly from Ottawa. For more specifics, consult the brochure "Canadian Theses on Microfiche Service" or write directly to the Canadian Theses on Microfiche Service, National Library of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N4, Canada.

8. Printed dissertations are normally small editions produced by photo-offset, frequently at the author's expense, and distributed both on an exchange and a complimentary basis by the degree-awarding institution to other academic libraries. The holdings of the Center for Research Libraries of such publications today may exceed 800,000 volumes. They are readily available through interlibrary loan to the universities that are currently members of the Center.

9. See especially the following publications:


NOTE: An earlier version of this conference paper was unofficially reviewed by staff members of the Library of Congress and University Microfilms International to insure accuracy, but the views expressed herein are strictly those of the author.