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Doctoral Dissertations on China and on Inner Asia, 1976-1990: An Annotated Bibliography of Studies in Western Languages

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For thirty years now Frank Joseph Shulman has been imposing bibliographical control on doctoral dissertations about Asia, east, south, and west. The present volume is his third devoted to China. The earlier volumes presented 4000 dissertations completed between 1945 and 1975. This one presents 9000 dissertations completed between 1976 and 1990, while adding 1300 more from the earlier period. The mathematically minded will notice that the pace of production has been increasing steadily; and there is no sign that it will slow down. That pace, plus the chronic shortage of information on dissertations from many parts of the world, has made most scholars despair of keeping up with them. Luckily for all of us, they have not been able to outrun Mr. Shulman.

Although the author describes the book minutely in his introduction, some statistics may be useful here. This volume includes 10,293 dissertations from forty countries on China, Hong Kong, Macao, Mongolia, Taiwan, Tibet, and overseas Chinese, Mongolian, and Tibetan communities round the world. Of them, 70% focus on China and Inner Asia while 30% deal with the region secondarily or tangentially. Nearly 50% of them were submitted to American institutions, and fully 51% have never been cited in Dissertation Abstracts International, which we often think of (wishfully) as being complete. Aside from full and precise bibliographical information, each entry includes translation of non-English titles and of Wade-Giles/Pinyin, a brief description of the contents, citation of published abstracts and of later publications based on the dissertation, and indication of the availability of copies (this last more fully explained in an extremely valuable appendix). The entries are logically and conveniently classified under forty-eight main subject headings (including the sciences and the professions) and hundreds of subheadings; there are thousands of cross-references as well. Three indices—by author, by institution, and by subject—complete the volume.

This book is the product of twenty years of the most painstaking effort, carried out with a single-minded dedication and tenacious pursuit of detail that will seem quite incredible to those who do not know Mr. Shulman. He has cast his net more widely here than in the earlier publications—the inclusion of 558 dissertations from the Soviet Union is especially welcome—and has given us a work that is as close to definitive as a reference book can possibly be; it is truly a bibliography of record. Some one, somewhere, will doubtless find a few omissions or misprints; she should not quibble about them in print, but should simply send them to Frank, who is already working on the next volume.

Some minds will boggle at the price of the book. It offers a clean format, accurate typesetting and printing, top-quality paper, and sturdy binding—a handsome production in every way. But at $245.00 it will be beyond the reach of many libraries, most individual scholars, and all students. This is the fault not of the author, nor entirely of the publisher, but largely of the economic realities of traditional publishing.
Another problem is that, on its appearance, the book is already eight years out of date. That too is due to the exigencies of traditional publishing; and for years we have all watched the Bibliography of Asian Studies (BAS) fall farther and farther behind. Scholars and students, beginning study of a subject with a bibliographical survey of what has already been done, usually prefer to start with the most recent work; and some means must be found to bring it to their attention in a more timely way.

Moreover, it will be desirable someday to cumulate this series, at the same time bringing all its entries up to the same level of detail. (Note that Vol. 1 was not annotated at all, and the second only partly.) But the present volume is itself already at the maximum size and weight for practical use. And to cumulate the existing series and its continuations in many massive tomes would certainly require a price that would restrict its dissemination even more.

What we need is an infinitely expandable format that can be supplemented or interleaved without having to be done over, one that will be of modest physical size and whose price will be (or promise to be) substantially lower. That means an online database to which new entries can be added as they become available, as in the RLIN and OCLC catalogues. The new technology has an irresistible momentum, and it is clear that the online database will soon be the usual format of ongoing bibliographical projects. The Association for Asian Studies is trying to do this with the BAS, and eventually it will succeed, despite the many obstacles of which we got a sobering glimpse in a recent Asian Studies Newsletter. But, at least for the present, it will remain important to publish also in traditional format, both to ensure that the contents will still be readable in twenty years and to serve scholars who do not have access to the electronic version.

We can only hope that some organization will make a long-term commitment to maintaining and updating a comprehensive bibliography of our field. Once the online BAS gets on its feet and brings costs under control, it may be able to expand its scope to include dissertations, which are too important to be arbitrarily segregated from published works and to be ignored by most bibliographers; it may even arrange to incorporate Mr. Shulman's existing database. Someday. In the meantime, for dissertations Frank Shulman's is the only game in town, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude.

Tim Connor

NOTES

The first volume in this series (see note 1) sold for $3.95 (paper).


It is worth noting that not a single library in mainland China (or Korea, or India) subscribes to the online *BAS*.