

Newton's First Law and ETDs: Scholarly Communication at a Liberal Arts
University in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Just as the first law of Newtonian physics states that an object at rest will remain at rest unless an external force acts upon it, the evolution of ETDs at Hong Kong Baptist University reveals challenges lying in the changing face of scholarly communication. Institutions, researchers and postgraduate students and librarians face incremental nudges and resistance in adjusting to technological changes personified by the open access movement, which is in its infancy in East Asia. By identifying areas of success as well as lessons in steering and promoting local research at a university in Hong Kong, whose focus is increasingly on research, this paper identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement in future research promotion.

INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

This paper examines the evolution of ETDs at an institution with a relatively recent implementation of graduate studies. It documents changes in practice and policy of Hong Kong Baptist University through this short period of disseminating original postgraduate research in East Asia. Universities expend substantial effort to produce original academic research. Almost any university activity can be tied to the larger goal of fostering faculty and postgraduates' research. However, despite unprecedented capability for universities to disseminate these works created in the process of becoming academic researchers, many parties remain cautious. University departments, faculty and even postgraduate authors are unsure how to tread in allowing ETDs maximum availability—especially, as it relates to new scholars' future publishing potential in an academic peer-review process.

Previous research has addressed this question by seeking publishers' views on whether manuscripts from ETDs are considered acceptable. The question of what faculty actually know about open access, mainly focusing on open access journals, has also been examined. However, researchers' views on open access ETDs and publishing potential in East Asia remains unexplored in any depth. Two years after Hong Kong Baptist University adopted a policy mandating deposit of ETDs in its open access institutional repository, I sought the views of faculty advisors of research postgraduates on the matter. In order to gauge faculty advisors' views, the author created a panel of faculty with the rank of associate professor, or above, as a criteria for identification of those who serve as advisors of postgraduates. The 224-member panel was then contacted through a survey webware several times over a two-week period to share their views on 4 basic questions. The responses, at 24.2% of the total, illustrate how researchers at an East Asian academic university view open access ETDs in the larger scholarly communication environment.

BACKGROUND

Hong Kong Baptist University is a medium-sized university of just over 7000 students, of which 251 are postgraduates who will author an ETD. It is a relative newcomer among Hong Kong academic institutions, having transformed from a teaching college into a university in the mid 1990s. As with other government supported universities in Hong Kong, research at HKBU is occupying an ever more prominent role. HKBU, along with 7 other universities are funded by the government's University Grants Council and just completed a Research Assessment Exercise in 2014, similar to those in the United Kingdom and Australia.

The relative novelty of its postgraduate programme yields great influence over how its theses and dissertations are administered and distributed. HKBU began its ETD programme in 2004, when the institution also began submission of English language PhD theses to Proquest UMI. Only research postgraduate theses (Ph.D, M.Phil) are available as ETDs at HKBU. Postgraduates in programmes which do not require intensive research are known as taught postgraduates, and their cumulative works, known locally as a dissertation, are not universally deposited in the library, nor are they available as ETDs. Only a few departments and programmes bind and deposit taught postgraduate works in the library.

Since the establishment of graduate study in 1994, there are 1670 postgraduate works at HKBU, of which 844 are ETDs with full text. There are 556 Ph.D theses and 694 M.Phil (Masters) theses in the collection. Dissertations form the remainder of the collection (25.2%), only their metadata is available in digital format.

Although HKBU's curricular focus would largely be considered liberal arts, it is known for its unique School of Chinese Medicine and in fact most of the postgraduate work comes from the Faculty of Science. Science theses form the majority of the collection (63.3% of Ph.Ds and 42.2% of M.Phils). Social Science

theses comprise 24% of Ph.Ds and 39.3% of MPhils. Arts & Humanities are the smallest discipline of both Ph.Ds (11.6%) and (14.6%) of MPhils.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the advent of ETDs from Virginia Tech in the United States, a growing literature base analyzes trends in this emerging field of scholarly communication. The rupture to the traditional publishing cycle prompted some searching over the nature of the thesis itself, as the culminating work in preparation for an academic career. An English literature scholar wonders if it wasn't time to re-evaluate the practice of the doctorate, which ignored scholarly communication trends at the turn of the century (Lang, 2002, p. 681). Covey (2013) summarizes this problem as follows:

What is at play here is a profound cultural and cognitive tension between the safe and familiar closure of print literacy and the wild and unknown openness of digital literacy (pp. 544–45).

Examinations of how advisors may influence the ETD as a part of scholarly communication reveal a picture of incomplete understanding of the changes involved. Studies on faculty knowledge of open access as it relates to self-archiving demonstrate limited grasp of the basic principles involved, such as pre-print or post-print archiving (Covey, 2009, p. 248), and very few academics acknowledge the library as a source of information regarding open access or scholarly communication (Gaines, 2015, p. 32). As many thesis advisors completed their doctorate in the pre-internet era, Lippincott & Lynch (2010, p.6) found that they often passed erroneous or outdated information on to their advisees, who in turn adopted an extremely cautious attitude towards publishing their ETDs. Some gaps in faculty knowledge may stem from a lack of reliance on expertise outside immediate colleagues, who share the same subject specialization (Maccoll & Jubb, 2011, p. 3).

A JISC (2012, p. 8, 50) study of young researchers' practices in the United Kingdom describes PhD candidates largely adopting outdated technological habits from their advisors, revealing little knowledge about copyright and few could say what their advisors views on openness in research and publishing were.

A joint report by Ithaka, JISC and RLUK on faculty's views on publishing finds that one of the most important factors of where to publish was 'circulated widely and are well read by academics in your field (Ithaka 2012, p. 71).' The same study reveals that 80% of polled academics felt their institution does not provide them with support regarding publishing contracts, evaluating impact, or assisting in making a pre-print or post-print work available in addition to the published version (Ithaka 2012, p. 75). In a literature review covering faculty and students' attitudes about ETDs, in a variety of international surveys, Brown (2010, p. 4) finds that the most prominent concern among students was the concept of ETDs as prior publication.

The interpretation that an ETD will be considered a prior publication, and may therefore limit postgraduates future ability to publish, is a consistent theme in ETD literature. Two early surveys from Virginia Tech librarians (McMillan, 2001), (Dalton & Seamans, 2004) focussed on asking publishers whether faculty's fears of theses rejected as prior publications were valid. Fyffe & Welburn (2008, p. 154) found that publishers did not consider theses prior publications. One work, an ETD in its own right (McCutcheon, 2010, p. 3), found that less than 2 of the 109 universities surveyed in the United States reported rejections of submitted content from ETDs. The original Virginia Tech survey was replicated ten years later, revealing that 45% of humanities and social science presses (M. L. Ramirez, Dalton, McMillan, Read, & Seamans, 2013, p. 372) "welcomed material from ETDs;" 51% of science publishers considered material from ETDs welcome (M. Ramirez *et al.*, 2014, pp. 816–817).

In the Asian context, the literature has largely focused on the development and availability of ETDs, and there is a gap for studying researchers' attitudes towards ETDs. Ahmed, Alreyaee & Rahman (2014) undertake a broad survey of

ETD practices across Asia by institutions listed within the Open Directory of Open Access Repositories. In Hong Kong, Chan (2009) examined practices of disseminating ETDs and pre- and post-print archiving in Hong Kong academic within institutional repositories.

EVOLUTION OF ETDs AT HKBU

There is no dedicated administrative office devoted solely to research at HKBU. The Graduate School, originally part of the Academic Registry, administers most aspects of postgraduate studies, including receipt of the final thesis or dissertation and accompanying guidelines. The Library receives the end product ensuring the familiar role of description, dissemination and preservation. From their beginning in 2004, ETDs of research postgraduates were made available through HKBU library's Innovative Interfaces WebOPAC. Each work was an original bibliographic record, with a full text in PDF embedded in a MARC 856 field.

Debate within the university over who owned the copyright was not settled in the early 2000s. The initial agreement form distributed to the authors did not clearly indicate whether the rights belonged to the university or to the author—merely stating that reproduction was governed by the Hong Kong Copyright Ordinance (fair-dealing). The agreement form did state that access to ETDs would be available only to the HKBU community, either on campus or through proxy verification—ETDs submitted to Proquest UMI were the only HKBU ETDs available beyond the university.

Submission of theses remained in printed copies, along with a CD ROM containing a PDF or MS Word document. The procedures laid out by the university's Graduate School's *Handbook for Research Post-Graduates*, detailed the number of printed copies of the work to be handed over to the Graduate School and the acceptable format of the accompanying ETD. Once the Graduate School received the work, it administered the binding and distribution of the bound works to the deans' offices, department offices and finally the library.

From 2004 to 2013 HKBU continued this practice. A lesser number of ETDs were transferred to Proquest UMI for publication. There was little supplemental institutional instruction or explanation of the terms on Proquest's doctoral dissertation agreement form—such as copyright, payment terms or author discount order offer. For those who did agree to submit their ETDs to Proquest, the library covered the publication fee and transferred their works via file transfer protocol approximately every six months.

In early 2013, a university panel overseeing research issues sought the library and Graduate School's views on intellectual property and theses. The library communicated that it felt the issue of copyright should be clarified, that copyright should be explicitly allocated to the student author, and drafted a proposal to redraft the release form identifying students as the owner of rights to the ETD, but granting HKBU non-exclusive rights to publish it as an open access ETD on the institutional repository. The library also recommended establishing an embargo option of one year on the revised release form. The recommendation was adopted in June 2013 and HKBU ETDs completed after September became openly accessible.

The university did not offer any objection to identifying student authors as the rights holders of ETDs, but meetings produced numerous questions and concerns about opening ETDs beyond the university. The library and Graduate School campaigned for open access to be included as a logical step towards any clarification of the terms in HKBU thesis release form. The library drafted a simple, easily understandable form, which included submission to Proquest UMI for English language works by PhD candidates.

As the library began processing ETDs after the open access policy effective date of September 2013, an ad hoc library workflow for theses was adopted and changed several times to suit the new reality (there are now 121 OA ETDs). New steps for adding PDF full text within the Digital Commons licensed institutional repository instead of a local drive were documented.

A WINDOW ON FACULTY THESIS ADVISOR VIEWS ON OPEN ACCESS ETDs IN EAST ASIA

In the spring of 2015, I administered a survey of HKBU faculty attitudes about ETDs, open access and its potential impact on future publishing prospects. The panel was formed from an educated guess that faculty with the rank of associate professor, rather than lecturer or assistant professor, would likely serve as postgraduate thesis advisors; 94% of the respondents indicated they were indeed advisors of postgraduates composing an M.Phil or Ph.D thesis. The panel size comprised of 224 faculty at this rank. The response rate was 24.5%.

The survey was well timed. In May of 2015, the Graduate School and administrative department responsible for teaching methods assistance (Centre for Holistic Teaching and Learning) co-organized a lunchtime Effective Research Students (sic) Supervision workshop. The survey on faculty views on open access ETDs was distributed the week after this well-attended workshop. HKBU faculty are faced with an institutional focus on attracting more research postgraduates to the university as part of the increased emphasis on research from the administration. Funding from a centralized government body, the University Grants Council, who use a Research Assessment Exercise every six years to allocate university budget shares based on panellists review, adds to the environment of added emphasis on academic research in Hong Kong.

58% of the respondents indicated that they were aware HKBU had adopted an open access policy for ETDs in 2013. The fact that 42% of faculty advisors answered that they were not aware of this policy, two years after its adoption, suggests room for improvement on behalf of the library and university in communicating this development.

Asked whether an open access ETD would make publishers less likely to accept a postgraduate's manuscript, 27% 'somewhat agreed'; another 9% responded that they 'strongly agreed' that an open access ETD would make manuscript acceptance less likely. Taken together, a total of 36% faculty advisors

indicated some level of acceptance that an open access ETD could pose challenges for the candidate's publishing potential.

However, 22% of respondents 'strongly disagreed' that an open access ETD would make publisher acceptance of a manuscript less likely—this taken with the highest number of responses (42%), that 'somewhat disagreed' with the statement, means that the majority of the respondents did not agree that open access ETDs makes manuscript acceptance less likely.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A majority of respondents indicate knowledge of the new open access policy for ETDs at HKBU. A majority of respondents also disagree, to some degree, that an open access ETD would make publishers less likely to accept a manuscript. However, almost 40% of the faculty advisors who responded were unaware of the open access ETD policy at the university and over 40% agree on some level that an open access ETD may be cause for publishers to pass on accepting a manuscript. In drawing conclusions from this survey, there are some useful points, but I believe it is useful to take the information with a grain of salt.

The largest problem lies in the composition of the respondents—45% of the respondents identified their discipline as Arts & Humanities, while only 16% identified Sciences as their discipline. While all departments in HKBU have seen the frequency of enrollment of research postgraduates increase in recent years, most of HKBU's existing thesis collection is from the Sciences. It would be difficult to assume that this sample is representative of all HKBU faculty advisors, and it would be extremely useful to have a larger sample from the discipline that has historically produced the most postgraduates.

Supplemental comments left by respondents indicate that discipline may play a very large role in attitudes, and this may be a next step in examining faculty advisor views on open access ETDs in East Asia. One respondent wrote "In the field of chemical sciences, before the student compiled his/her thesis, many of the new findings have already been submitted for publication." My

interpretation of this statement is that research postgraduates in the Sciences are more likely to submit results for publication before their completion date—something a person whose publishing goal is in monograph form (Arts & Humanities), would find difficult to do.

Other comments echo views stated by publishers in previous articles observing, "...Reputable publishers would require (possibly) significant rewriting so the publishable ms will not be the same as the original thesis." And, "... it is a common practice that we note in the manuscript [sic] that the paper is based in part on the student's thesis. So far, I have not encountered any major issue with publishers due to that fact." These comments do not detail any evidence of publisher denial of ETD material due to prior-publication, but instead share similarities to publisher survey responses in previous literature.

Institutionally, my goal in conducting this study was to better understand views within my community, in order to formulate future service plans in disseminating and preserving ETDs at HKBU. I do not see significant differences between the responses and the views collected by the large reports by JISC and Ithaka recording faculty's views in other parts of the world. However, I believe an additional area for concentration for future study is an exploration of publishers in East Asia—Chinese language publishing continues to be print-centric and if this state of affairs has any effect on open access ETDs in Chinese. However, at HKBU, less than 20% of Ph.Ds and M.Phils are in Chinese, so this may best be explored in another environment. The large publishers of Chinese language material have not fully abandoned print to the degree that has already occurred in North America and Europe.

By continuing to elicit researchers' views on scholarly communication, HKBU library can continue to ensure that objects in motion remain in motion. Serving as a point of information about activity in scholarly communications, while disseminating local research in a manner that is helpful to HKBU will ensure that the motion our ETDs have generated, do not come to rest.

APPENDIX

1. Please describe your academic field

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Sciences	9	16%
2	Social Sciences	21	38%
3	Arts & Humanities	25	45%
	Total	55	100%

2. Are you a supervisor of post-graduate students composing an Mphil or PhD thesis?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	51	94%
2	No	3	6%
	Total	54	100%

3. In 2013 Hong Kong Baptist University adopted open access theses---meaning full text is freely accessible in electronic format via the Library. Were you aware of this (new) policy?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Yes	32	58%
2	No	23	42%
	Total	55	100%

4. An open access thesis in electronic format would make publishers less likely to accept a post-graduate's manuscript for publication.

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Strongly disagree		12	22%
2	Somewhat disagree		23	42%
3	Somewhat agree		15	27%
4	Strongly agree		5	9%
	Total		55	100%

5. Please feel free to provide any supplemental information

Text Response

What publisher looks for in a piece of academic output is not what a thesis would provide.

Only cr*p publishers publish theses 'as is'. Reputable publishers would require (possibly) significant rewriting so the publishable ms will not be the same as the original thesis

In the field of chemical sciences, before the student compiled his/her thesis, many of the new findings have already been submitted for publication.

This may consider the results has been published.

For quality research, open source access may actually *enhance* likelihood of publication by creating an advance market for readership.

I don't supervise Post-graduate students

There may be some publishers with such kind of policy, but then there are also others with opposing practice.

It is usually the case that the submitted manuscript contains only some and partial results produced in the thesis and for publication purposes the focus can have been switched and the paper contains extended and perhaps more indepth analyses. By the way, it is a common practice that we note in the manuscript that the paper is based in part on the student's thesis. So far, I have not encountered any major issue with publishers due to that fact.

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