

elaborate diagrams of building components, including details of interlocking timber joints, many of great ingenuity: the captions here are printed in contrasting red ink. There are designs for the timber framing of palace-type buildings all displaying highly sophisticated skills in constructional design.

Dr Guo writes, "the author, Li Jie (1065–1110), was one of a few great figures from ancient times that we know something about in the field of building science and technology." Li Jie received a commission from Emperor Zhe Zong in 1097 to formulate a new work composed of a total of 3,555 items in 357 sections, a task which took three years. It consist of five parts, each breaking down into 13 sections.

We are told that a copy of the building manual was owned by the Danish architect Jørn Utzon, architect of the Sydney Opera House, and that the manual exerted a strong influence upon his work.

Purchase of the *Yingzao Fashi* is particularly apposite given the large numbers of overseas students studying within the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning and the University of Melbourne's strong commitment towards internationalism. Combining the dual virtues of beauty and utility, the book will prove to be an invaluable resource for higher degree research and give generations of students at the University wonderful insights into oriental building practices 900 years ago. We acknowledge the support of the Friends of the Baillieu Library in making this wonderful purchase possible. ♦

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THE THESIS COLLECTION

BY LESLEY CAELLI

THERE ARE SOME 200,000 ITEMS spread across nearly a dozen collections in the University of Melbourne Library's Special Collections. Yet none of these collections is as widely used as the Thesis Collection.

On the surface of it, the University of Melbourne Thesis Collection looks like a fairly dull group of books. In fact in terms of aesthetic value the volumes are quite plain. Ordinary bindings, unexciting paper with dull typefaces and often few illustrations. But the intrinsic value of a thesis lies not in its outward appearance, rather it is the wealth of knowledge contained in these unremarkable looking books that makes the collection one of the most valuable in the Library.

The actual origins of the Thesis Collection are somewhat hazy. Special Collections took custodianship of the collection in the early 1970s, but it had been in existence one way or another for many years before then. One of the earliest theses listed in the Library card catalogue is by Sydney Dodd and was passed in 1910, while the University's first Ph.Ds were awarded in 1948 to Erica Wolff (Arts) and Rupert Horace Myers (Science). Since then the University of Melbourne has put much into developing its standing as a centre of research. The Thesis Collection plays an important role in this development, both as a permanent archive of past research and as a point of access to a diverse wealth of information.

It is this diversity which turns the Thesis Collection into a dynamic, ever changing organism. The theses cover

topics ranging from science through to the arts and humanities, and every subject in between. A thesis isn't just a collection of words bound together between two covers. It is the culmination of one person's dedication to their field of study, a labour of love on which they have spent many months in painstaking research and writing. It is an exciting and challenging time for anyone undertaking research, and when the final product is completed, all research students like to think that their months of commitment and hard work will not go unnoticed.

Although the basic method of researching and writing a thesis has gone unchanged over the years, one area which is having a profound impact on the production of theses is advancements in the fields of communications and information technology.¹ In the past the only method of presenting a thesis was in the form of a typewritten manuscript. Today's research students have access to a wide range of multimedia components and it is not unusual for a thesis to be submitted with an accompanying video, CD-ROM or floppy disc forming an integral part of the work. For Special Collections this raises many issues in terms of storing multimedia items as well as providing access to those who wish to utilise this material.

Currently the Thesis Collection is in the midst of a major relocation project. With between 600 and 700 new theses added to the collection each year, it has finally outgrown its current home and the decision was made

to temporarily relocate a certain proportion of the collection offsite. Since January many of the theses produced before 1975 have gone into storage in the Carm Centre in Bundoora, while theses produced after 1990 are being moved to the Special Collections' third floor stack in the Baillieu Library. There were many reasons behind this decision, the most important being the need to increase the availability to the most highly used portion of the collection. On average, the Special Collections reading room issues around 120 theses per month, many of which have been produced in the last five to ten years. Having this portion of the collection close to hand will not only make retrieval times quicker, but Special Collections staff will be able to keep a closer eye on the theses and monitor their use and the growth of the collection more effectively.

However, this issue of storage and access to the thesis collection is on the verge of undergoing a radical overhaul. Since 1997 the University of Melbourne has been involved with the Australian Digital Thesis Project. It aims to establish a national distributed database of digital versions of theses produced by participating institutions.² The project argues that theses are an underused resource due to a number of factors: lack of knowledge of their existence or their contents; and the fact the many theses are not readily available outside of the institution where they were produced.

The establishment of a national thesis database will enable research information to become more widely available. It is planned that full text versions of theses will be made available via the web, and eventually students will no longer be required to submit a paper copy of their thesis. Rather an electronic copy will be submitted for assessment and then added to the database. Already some universities in the USA will only accept theses submitted electronically, and it

will not be long before Australian universities follow suit. This of course raises even more issues in terms of long term storage and archiving of electronic information, access to material, copyright of original research and the retrospective digitisation of older material. The Australian Digital Thesis Project recognises these as important issues, and as it progresses into phase two of the project it will address and seek answers for these and other questions as they arise.

On the surface of it, the University's Thesis Collection may seem rather prosaic, but just by looking a little deeper you find that the wealth of information that has been accumulated over the years makes this a dynamic, living collection which is also undergoing a number of major changes. As the advancement in technology becomes more of an influencing factor on the way we learn and study, the old notion of a thesis as being little more than a collection of words is rapidly losing favour. The inclusion of multimedia components is allowing theses to go beyond the page. The Australian Digital Thesis Project will give many more students and researchers the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge contained in these under-appreciated collections, not only at the University of Melbourne, but at universities around Australia, and indeed the world. ♦

NOTES

1. Barbara Evans, "The future of the Ph.D." in *Graduate News*, February 2000, pp. 4-5.
2. Australian Digital Thesis Project, <<http://www.library.unsw.edu.au/thesis/erd.html>>.

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