

East Asian Languages and Cultures Department

The Dissertation Prospectus

The dissertation prospectus should offer a provisional account of (1) what your argument is, (2) why it matters, and (3) what body of evidence you will draw on to substantiate it. Your “argument” might be expressed as a focused research question, as a hypothesis, or as a tentative thesis. In explaining why it matters, you should outline how your dissertation will contribute to, or change, the existing scholarship on the topic. And in describing a body of evidence, you should indicate which primary and secondary texts are essential to your project.

In addition to these general aims, your prospectus should provide answers to the following questions:

- Why are you addressing this topic? How does it build upon your previous work (i.e. your minor fields) and how is your approach, archive, or perspective significant?
- Do you make use of any special methodological or theoretical perspective? How is it appropriate to your topic and body of evidence?
- What is the proposed organization of the dissertation?

Content

1. Title: A working title that indicates the topic and emphasis of your project.
2. Statement of Thesis: This should describe your project, outline its potential interest and scholarly significance, and identify your core objects of study. What is the topic/problem you wish to study/resolve and what is its interest or significance in current scholarly and/or historical thinking? State clearly and concisely how you presently conceive this topic/problem and how you suppose it can be studied/resolved. How do you anticipate your work contributing to the field at large?
3. The Literature Review: What work has, and has not, been done in this field and on your topic (in English primarily but also in your research language(s) such as Chinese, Japanese, or Korean)? If there are no works precisely on your topic, what works have created an important foundation upon which you will build? Discuss relevant scholarship critically. It is not necessary to criticize specific failings; but show what is understood to be the merits and limitations of relevant works. How do you propose to develop, challenge, or depart from existing positions or themes in historical literature?

4. Method and Theory: Outline an approach to the subject. If the conception has theoretical aspects, discuss them critically. Have scholars in other fields developed concepts of potential interest to the topic? Think about method and theory, even if there is a decision not to engage much with external perspectives and theory. The faculty neither encourages nor discourages such engagement, but cautions that original scholarly work should not simply illustrate other people's ideas.
5. Sources: What primary sources do you plan to use in the dissertation? Where do you plan to find them, e.g. libraries, archives, digital databases, or private collections? A primary source is any kind of first-hand documentation. If you are writing a literature dissertation, your primary sources might be poems, novels, or plays. If you are writing a historical dissertation, a primary source could be a paper document created by someone in the past – historical archives, old letters, diaries, journals, logbooks, etc. Other kinds of primary sources might include films and documentary films, illustrations and photos, newspaper or magazine articles, maps and artifacts, sound recordings, government documents, or interviews. Provide your assessment of the strength and weakness of your primary sources.
6. A chapter breakdown: write tentative accounts of each chapter, dedicating a page or less to each. How you anticipate the different components of your dissertation fitting together and build on one another? State the texts that you will consider in each chapter. Why did you select these texts and these authors? How do they advance the overall questions posed in the Statement of Thesis?

A timeline: outlining what you intend to complete and when.

A working bibliography: although this might include a few important works you have not yet read, it mostly should represent the research you have done so far. List the major primary and secondary sources.

Length: Your prospectus should be between 15-20 pages, double-spaced pages in length, not counting the tentative schedule, working bibliography, and description of special needs.

*If applicable, a description of special needs: e.g., do you need to travel or conduct specific archival research, develop new linguistic or technical skills, or use special equipment?

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/demystifying-the-dissertation-proposal/>