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**Recommended Citation**

Hérubel, Jean-Pierre V. M., "Paris Versus Province, French Dissertation Research in Selected Humanities and Social Science Disciplines: Qualitative Observations and Significance, 1977-2006" (2010). *Libraries Faculty and Staff Presentations*. Paper 113.  
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# Paris Versus Province, French Dissertation Research in Selected Humanities and Social Science Disciplines: Qualitative Observations and Significance, 1977-2006

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**Keywords:** dissertations, humanities, Paris, provinces, social sciences

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**1 Introduction:** Higher education in France is centralized, with national administration, funding, and programmatic responsibilities (Musselin, 2003). Since doctoral dissertations represent the highest formal achievements in higher education, they represent an intellectual register of research generated by higher education. (Hesseling, 1986; Kouptsov, 1994; Rothblatt, & Wittrock, 1993; Rutledge, 1994; de Ridder-Symoens, 1992). Additionally, dissertation production provides an approach to identifying research trends useful for administrators and policy makers who must address issues of research education and research funding. This exploratory examination focuses on French dissertation production in selected humanities and social sciences to determine geographical venues in dissertation research and whether the common perception of Parisian dominance is a realistic reflection of French doctoral disciplinary research (Wanner, 1975).

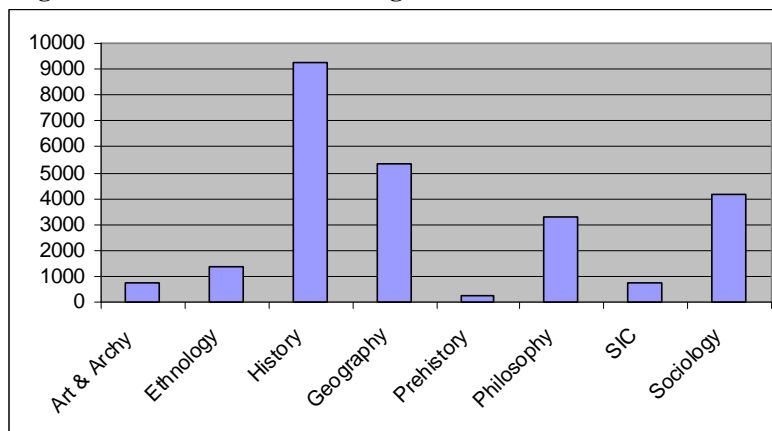
## 2 Method

Dissertations for 1977-2006 in representative humanities and social sciences: art & archaeology, ethnology, history, geography, philosophy, prehistory, SIC (information science & communication), sociology were searched in SUDOC (Système universitaire de documentation) for discipline and geographical affiliation; only universities and the EHESS (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, were triaged since they fully participate in SUDOC. Informed by historical context and general conditions of French academia, analysis includes examination of disciplinary evolution and history of selected disciplines.

## 3 Qualitative Observations

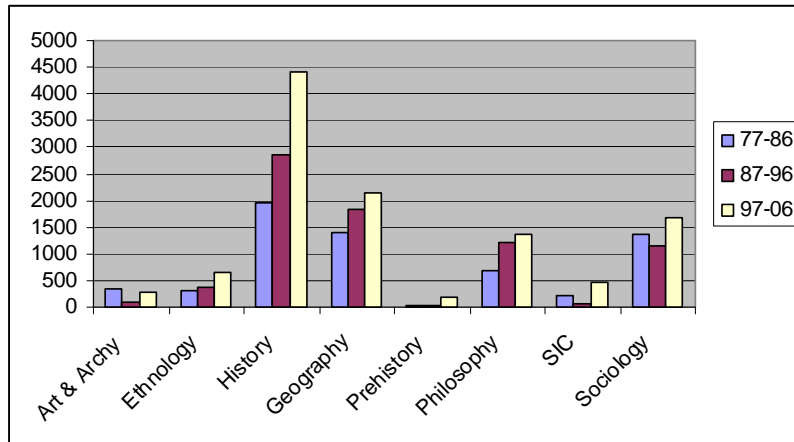
The search yielded 25,039 dissertations for the decennial target years, with production levels representative of disciplinary activity (See Figures 1 and 2):

**Figure 1 Total Production of Target Dissertations 1977-2006**



Source: SUDOC

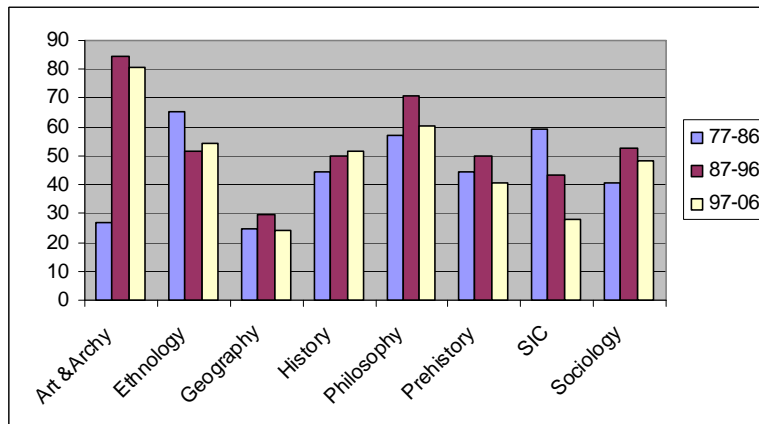
**Figure 2 Decennial Production of Target Dissertations**



Source: SUDOC

A variegated pattern of Parisian/provincial association emerged—historical evolution *may constitute disciplinary destiny* (Charles, 1985; Charle, 1986; Charle, 1994; Ringer, 1992). Provincial institutions experienced a varied history of neglect and support (Clark, 1973; Weisz, 1983; Musselin, & Mignot-Gerard, 2002); since early 20<sup>th</sup> century, governmental authorities redressed such conditions via subventions, etc. (See Figure 3):

**Figure 3 Parisian Percentage of Dissertations**



Source: SUDOC

#### 4 Concluding Observations

Parisian dominance of French dissertation production does not hold; Paris/province orientation indicates respective disciplinary evolution, specialization, and strengths:

- **Art & Archaeology**—Parisian domination--Paris I, Paris IV, and Paris X (Therrien, & Monnier, 1998). Provincial universities hold dominance in regional orientation in all genres of art; archaeology, medieval ages, and ancient Gaul.
- **Ethnology**—EHESS and Paris I and Paris IV form a nucleus for ethnology, while provincial institutions capture more local ethnographic specialization (Karady, 1972; Revel & Wachtel, 1996).
- **Geography**—Emerged system-wide among provincial institutions where regional geography flourished; dominated by provincial institutions (Hérubel, 2005). Paris I is most established

national department, but provinces specialize in regional geography, i.e. University of Grenoble I--alpine geography. Non-French specializations--Universities of Toulouse I, University of Bordeaux.

- **History**—established late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with each university specializing in local, regional and provincial historical interests (Hérubel, 2006). Paris I, Paris IV, and Paris X constitute national core.
- **Philosophy**—established early 19<sup>th</sup> century for secondary schools and universities; a canonical discipline (Schrift, 2006). Universities of Paris I and IV constitute nexus; exceptions, provincial universities specialize in certain fields, i.e. Universities of Strasbourg II for philosophy of religion, Poitiers, medieval, Nice, continental, Tours, Renaissance. (Hérubel, 2007).
- **Prehistory**—established early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Paris and province, where regional interest in prehistoric artifacts and cultures were in evidence (Coye, 1997). Parisian/provincial division is stasis with no demonstrable advantage--provincial strengths are grounded in local, regional focus.
- **SIC**—developed at Institut de la Presse Française, University of Paris II, as well as at University de Bordeaux III; established in 1975 SIC is inter/multidisciplinary in nature; Universities of Paris II and Bordeaux constitute major centers (Boure, 2002; Hérubel, 2007).
- **Sociology**—established early 20<sup>th</sup> century at Sorbonne, spread to EHESS (Piriou, 1999); balanced between Parisian and provincial affiliation, with EHESS, founded in 1975, locus of excellence.

Disciplinary geographical alignment and evolution varies with historical conditions.

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