Cultural sensitivity, discoverability, and social justice in archival representations: A case study of Chinese students in the University of Illinois Archives

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INTRODUCTION

- The authors as Library and Information professionals who were born and raised in China and now live in the United States

People embrace by a makeshift memorial to shooting victims outside Gold Spa in Atlanta on March 20.
RELATED WORK

- Studies arguing underrepresented communities can be less visible, misrepresented, or even depreciated in the cultural records (Adler et al., 2017; Dobreski, Qin & Resnick, 2019)
- Practical guidance for reexamining and remediating collections about or created by marginalized communities (e.g., the Anti-Racist Description Resources by Antracoli et al., 2020)
- Work that focus on representation issues of Chinese cultures in American cultural institutions remain scarce.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

● How are historical Chinese students represented in the University of Illinois (U of I) Archives?
● How can we strive for more culturally sensitive ways to represent historical Chinese U of I students?
RESEARCH DESIGN

Examining representation: identifying where and how Chinese students (from 1904 to 1920) “appear” in the archives through a critical lens

Representation in two “spaces”:

Space 1: Representations in primary sources held by the archives (e.g., yearbooks, correspondence)

Space 2: Representations in tools/systems supplied by the archives to provide access to primary sources (e.g., item descriptions, finding aids, guides)
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Consult with U of I Archives:
- Navigate collections, develop search strategy

Search in holdings:
- Individuals by name + groups (e.g., Chinese Students’ Club)
- Some examined collections:
  - Daily Illini digital full text collection
  - Illini Everywhere blog posts

Class of 1918

A 1919 Illio profile photo of Mr. Ye Young Chan, found in Record Series 41/8/805.
Mr. Ye Young Chan, (A.B. Liberal Arts and Sciences), of Shin Ning City, prepared at Nanking Military School, Wheaton Academy, Wheaton College, and the University of Wisconsin, before coming to Illinois. [25] After graduation, Mr. Chan had a position in the Chinese government, and he attended the 1930 Chinese alumni gathering in Nanking.

A 1919 Illio profile photo of Mr. Jungting Chen, found in Record Series 41/8/805.
Mr. Jung-Ting Chen, (B.S. Agriculture), of Canton, prepared at the Canton Christian College and Tsinghua College, before coming to Illinois. [26] While he was as student, Mr. Chen was active in student groups, including singing at the 1917 Chinese cultural program organized by the Cosmopolitan Club. After graduation, by 1922, Mr. Chen had become head of the Kiangsu Third Provincial Agricultural School’s Department of Animal Husbandry.

Synthesize findings:
"Model" of issues in representation
ISSUES IN REPRESENTATION

INACCURACIES
INCONSISTENCIES
INAPPROPRIATENESS

PRIMARY SOURCES
ARCHIVES - GENERATED CONTENT

DISCOVERABILITY & ENGAGEMENT

A social justice issue
The description page of a digitized photograph of C. C. Wang from the archives

Retrieved March 27, 2022 from https://archon.library.illinois.edu/index.php?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=9034
INCONSISTENCIES

Teng, Kwangtang


Kwang-tang Teng, Bachelor of Arts (Liberal Arts)


A 1915 Illio profile photo of Mr. Kwangtang Teng, found in Record Series 41/8/805.

Mr. Kwang Tang Teng, (A.B. Literature, Art, and Science, 1914), of Canton, prepared at Peiyang University (now Tianjin University), before coming to Illinois. [50]

Article from the Daily Illini (25 Sep 1912), title has the phrase “forty-five Orientals registered.”
Retrieved from [https://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=DIL19120925.2.20&e=-------en-20--1--img-txIN--------]

Terms that are deemed culturally insensitive today occasionally appeared.
Treating the second character of the first name as a middle name when initializing names.

Illio Yearbook profile of Hua Ching Ou and its caption in blog post “Illini Everywhere: Chinese Illini, Since 1906.”
Retrieved from https://www.library.illinois.edu/slc/illini-everywhere/chinese-illini/
NEXT STEPS

- Collect more information about students and students organizations
- Develop recommendations for information professionals
REFERENCES


THANKS!

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