

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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While a growing body of work has reflected on the absence, lower visibility, and misrepresentation of marginalized communities in library and archival collections, studies that specifically focus on representation issues of Chinese cultures in U.S. collections remain scarce. To begin to bridge this gap, we are conducting an in-progress case study that examines how Chinese students at the University of Illinois (from 1904 to 1920) are documented and described in the university's archives. The study is based on an inductive, qualitative analysis of relevant primary sources in the archives, their associated descriptive metadata, and additional materials created by the archival institution. We identified where and how Chinese students of this period are often recorded and synthesized an emerging typology of the representation issues that we found. The common problems in representations are inaccuracies, inconsistencies, and inappropriateness ("3Is") within and across primary sources and additional archives-generated content. We use this case to weave together ideas about cultural sensitivity, discoverability, and social justice in the archives and explore how university archival collections can be constructed in ways that place more emphasis on an ethics of care.

About the authors:

Ruohua Han is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She holds an M.S. degree from Renmin University of China (majoring in Archival Studies). Her research interests are in personal and familial archiving, everyday information practices, and personal and collective memory. She has always been fascinated by the material traces of the daily lives of individuals and families that are intentionally or fortuitously created, curated, and retained by themselves and others. Therefore, her overarching research agenda is using qualitative methods to explore the diverse ways that people document themselves in their everyday lives and how their lives can be documented by other entities such as cultural institutions. Specifically, some of her work include (1) identifying motivations for "going analog" when Chinese individuals make personal archiving choices, (2) understanding how Chinese parents and children interact with personal archives in contexts of providing or receiving parental guidance, and (3) examining how Chinese students at the University of Illinois from 1904 to 1920 are documented and described in the university's archives (in collaboration with Yingying Han).

Yingying Han is a fifth-year doctoral student at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her advisor is Professor Martin Wolske. Her research interests fall under critical archival studies and computational archival sciences. Specifically, she studies (1) how critical theories challenge the conventional dominant understanding of archival theory and practices and, (2) how critical theories may contribute to the archival preservation for people who are marginalized, (3) how public engagement with archives can contribute to social justice issues and, (4) how computational approaches (such as Machine Learning) may challenge

traditional understanding of archival practices. She is currently with Ruohua Han to examine how historical Chinese international students are represented in university archives in the United States. Another of her paper, “The Long Journey Home”: A Case Study of Learning Japanese American Incarceration History Using Natural Language Processing” is under review by The Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS).