Digitizing “Chinese Englishmen”

Archival Silences and Creating a Nineteenth-Century “Postcolonial” Archive

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Some things to think about before you exhort everyone to code

Oh, how I hate being the bearer of bad news. Yet I feel I have to tell you something about the frustration I’m hearing, in whispers and on the backchannel, from early-career women involved in digital humanities.

Here, there, and everywhere, we’re being told: A DHer should code! Don’t know how? Learn! The work that’s getting noticed, one can’t help but see, is code. As digital humanities winds its way into academic departments, it seems reasonable to predict that the work that will get people jobs — the work that marks a real digital humanist — will be work that shows that you can code.

And that work is overwhelmingly by men. There are some important exceptions, but the pattern is pretty clear.
Challenges to the Digital Humanities Community

- Overemphasis on coding? ("Culture of code")
- Invisible privileging of middle-class white men?
- How does DH nurse unconscious biases in race, class, gender, disability?
EDITORS’ CHOICE: ARCHIVAL SILENCES ROUND-UP

By Ted Underwood, Katherine Harris, Adeline Koh, Roger Whitson, and Natalio Cedra | March 5, 2012

Ted Underwood, Big but not distant, March 3, 2012

It's true that DH doesn't have to be identified with scale. But the fact remains that problems of scale constitute a huge blind spot for individual researchers, and also define a problem that we know computers can help us explore. And when you first go into an area that was a blind spot for earlier generations of scholars, you're almost guaranteed to find research opportunities—lying out on the ground like lumps of gold you don't have to mine.

Katherine Harris, Big Data, DH, Gender: Silence in the Archives?, March 3, 2012

Ted Underwood's tremendous undertaking, reading Miriam Posner's blog post, "Some things to think about before you exhort everyone to code," and reading the really interesting (and enormous) set of comments by the DH community on both posts, I was moved to tweet about a recent data set. Romanticism and Victoriana on the Net came out with its latest journal edition which includes an interesting article about big data, aesthetics and the long 18th century in literature. (Yep, as a Romanticist, I too bristle that some fields persist in trying to subsume Romantic-era literature into the long 18th or 19th centuries...but that's another story about administrative politics in underfunded departments.)

Adeline Koh, Addressing Archival Silence on 19th Century Colonialism – Part

Search DHNow

News

- Resource: Research Data Curation Bibliography, updated 1/14/2013
- Resource: Anthologize 0.7
- CFP: Electronic Literature Organization, 2013 Paris
- CFP: participation: Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) Group
- Opportunity: 2013 Summer Internship Opportunities at Berkman Center, Harvard
- Opportunity: PhD in the Production of Literature Graduate Research Fellowships – Digital Humanities, Carleton U.
- Opportunity: Dodson Visiting Professor of Information Studies.
Posner: “Silences” in DH

Especially in terms of representation of women + minorities
Today: probe a *specific* silence

silence on *race and colonialism* in the nineteenth century archive
Today’s presentation

- Silence towards race & colonialism in 19th century digital archive
- Existing 19th century digital archive tends towards presentation & documentation of white European & American writers
- Existing projects obscure connections of England to Empire
- Discuss *Digitizing Chinese Englishmen*: [http://chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org](http://chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org)
  - Project on Anglophone writing in SE Asia
  - Project attempts to address bias in *content* and *form*
  - Project is “postcolonial” in the ways it attempts to examine and question imperialist ideology through way the archive is structured, and by the representation of work by people of color
Recent Proliferation of Nineteenth-Century Websites: A Digital Revolution?
Significant: digital recovery of European & American women’s writing
But: Where Are the Digital Projects on 19th C Britain + Imperialism?
Traditional Victorian Studies: characterized by J.R. Seeley: “the British Empire was acquired in a fit of absence of mind”

Impact of work of postcolonial scholars: Said, Spivak, McClintock

Erin O’Connor: Victorian Studies: ‘postcolonialism’ reductive for Victorian Studies?
Role of colonies in the Victorian world?

- Resistance towards integration of the colonies into understanding the Victorian period

- E.g. British Women Romantic Poets

- Given that Victorian period=period of greatest English imperial expansion, this gap in digital scholarship needs to be addressed.
Anjali Arondeka, Michel Trouillot, Ann Stoler, Subaltern Studies Collective: archives are not about ‘retrieving knowledge’ but about knowledge production.

Trouillot: “Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources), the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives) the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance).”
The Archive & Power

- Archives as forms by which knowledge is made visible/knowable
- Foucault: *Archaeology of Knowledge*
  - rules: limit possibility of knowledge
- Derrida: *Archive Fever*
  - “achronic power”
“Rules” of the 19th Century Digital Archive

- Through the ways these archives present knowledge, they call “realities” into being.
- Digital archives constitute new *archaeology* of scholarly and public knowledge.
- Future: digital archives become replacements for physical ones?
Issues w existing 19th century digital archive

- Existing 19-C archive has several problems in terms of race & ethnicity
- Lack of easily accessible digital projects on/by people of color
- Amy Earhart’s work on North American canon
- Earhart: notes that DH areas such as tool building & visualization have neglected examining canonical texts by writers of color
19th Century Archival “Rules”

- Empire as separate from Britain

- 2 methods: 1) lack of digital projects about Britain and Empire, 2) elision of colonialism from existing 19th century digital projects

- Especially so for prominent 19th century websites e.g. NINES federation, William Blake Archive, Dante Rossetti Archive etc.
While digital projects already contain refs and objects about colonialism, navigation to this content is tricky.

- e.g. Matthew Arnold’s impact on India

Important: to make race and colonialism a legible lens to contextualize the work of 19th century British writers
E.g. 1: NINES website--
Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth Century Scholarship
NINES: What happens if you click on “Egypt”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>By</th>
<th>Site</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Mameluke of Cairo in Egypt</td>
<td>A Geographical Present: Being Descriptions of the Several Countries of Africa.</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt. Pyramid of Cheops</td>
<td>Excursions daguerriennes : vues et monuments les plus remarquables du globe.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- No full websites emerge, despite:
- Websites such as *Making Britain: South Asian Visions of Home and Abroad 1870-1950* being in existence
Problems

- Two dynamics:
  - 1) Lack of digital projects on Britain and its Empire
  - 2) Elision of empire from existing projects
    - --> creates an ‘archaeology of 19th century knowledge’ that erases impact and role of colonialism
  - Also, static nature of these digital archives--no comments allowed---> make forms of knowledge authoritarian
Why is this a problem?

- Many 19th century digital archives are open access
- Encourages public access --> forms public knowledge about the 19th century
- Not behind paywalls as are most peer reviewed publications
- Digital archives have the “achronic power” of making impact of colonialism real or imagined
Need for 19th century digital projects to:

- Engage with work by postcolonial scholars (Said, Spivak, McClintock, Gikandi, Mohanty...)
- Goal with *Digitizing Chinese Englishmen*: to apply postcolonial theorists to digital archive
- Creating more archival practices that encourage a fluid representation of global connection between Britain, India, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia
Victorian Values and the Straits Chinese Magazine

The Digitizing 'Chinese Englishmen' Project

chineseenglishmen.adelinekoh.org
Who are the ‘Chinese Englishmen’?

- Anglophone Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, specifically Singapore and Malaysia
- Torn between two Empires: Qing Chinese and British
- Privileged class of non-Europeans
- Bourgeois intermediaries
Why “Chinese Englishmen”? 

- Intense relationship with the British Empire
- “Queen’s Chinese” / “King’s Chinese”
- Adhered to Victorian norms, values, modes of dress --> loyal British subjects
“Hail Victoria!”

“All hail Victoria! / Hail to her Jubilee! / Well may all the nations conspire / To praise her Sovereignty!”

Holden: “If we look for an anti-colonial consciousness, the *Straits Chinese Magazine* is frustrating”

Straits Chinese cultural norms - what Homi Bhabha has called mimicry/hybridity
The *Straits Chinese Magazine* 

- Modeled after *Blackwoods* and *Macmillans* 

- Upper-class periodical to give voice to Chinese diaspora of Malaya 

- Edited by Song Ong Siang and Lim Boon Keng
The Straits Chinese Magazine

- Victorian values versus ethnic Chinese identity
- 中學為體，西學為用 or, “Chinese learning as the essence, Western learning for application”
Victorian values and norms continue to structure most of the short stories and essays.

Whiteness transmuted into Victorian masculinity (self-discipline, restraint); and Victorian femininity.
“A Victim of Chap-Ji-Ki”

- Vol 2. No. #6
- morality tale of how gambling (‘chap-ji-ki’) will lead to insanity and death
- teaches: Victorian values such as self-restraint as form of masculinity
“Chinese Athleticism”

- News article (Vol 1 No.#1)
- Asking for land for “athletic games and sports generally” to cultivate Victorian ideals of health and manliness.
Hybrid Victorian Values: Shared Across British Empire

- Philip Holden, Daniel Goh, Chua Ai Lian: Foreshadows postcolonial nationalism
- Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*: “inner/spiritual” vs. “outer/material”
Why the *Straits Chinese Magazine*?

- Impact of Victorian ideals transported by colonialism has resonance with other parts of British Empire, and other European Empires
- C.L.R. James’ *Black Jacobins*
- Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*
Designing a Decentralized, “Postcolonial” Archive

- “Decentralized” archive --> modes for democratic access and exchange
- “Postcolonial” refers to Edward Said & postcolonial studies collective of the 1980s, more of a mode of criticism than time period

Our main mission is to work towards a “decolonization of the archive.” But what is the archive, and what does it mean to “decolonize” it? Why is “decolonizing the archive” important?

Our idea of the archive comes from the “Postcolonial Studies” group, such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Partha Chatterjee and Sara Suleri, who argued in the 1980s that the West had “Orientalized,” or created powerful derogatory stereotypes of non-white people prevalent throughout its literature, art and culture, or “archive.” The “Postcolonial Studies” group argued for a rereading of this literature, art and culture, or what V.Y. Mudimbe termed the rereading of the “colonial library,”—a cultural repository of information that had become the “archive” for representing people of non-European descent.

*Digitizing Chinese Englishmen* aims to contribute to the “decolonization” of this archive, to provide alternate ways of representing people of non-European descent, and to show how the nineteenth-century British Empire connected the British with the peoples of its colonies.
A “Postcolonial” 19th-century Archive?

- A ‘postcolonial archive’ is one which examines and questions the impact and creation of imperialist ideology within the structure of the archive itself.

- Elizabeth Povinelli--investigate the compositional logics of the archive.

- Allen Isaacman, Premesh Lalu, Thomas Nygren: an archive which interrogates traces of colonialism & apartheid in knowledge production.
The Structure of Digitizing ‘Chinese Englishmen’

- Subject matter allows for more comparative structures of similar hybrid dynamics across 19th century European empires

- Spinoffs: “African Englishmen,” “Indian Englishmen,” “Caribbean Englishmen” etc...
The Structure of Digitizing ‘Chinese Englishmen’

- “Hypertext” linkages, use of tags, provide different types of reading
- May “open up” text to different interpretations
The Structure of *Digitizing ‘Chinese Englishmen’*

- Comments field-- “Opening up” of archive

**One Response to *decolonizing the archive***

**Katherine D. Harris** says:
February 28, 2012 at 5:00 pm

Can you add a section here on the technical aspects of the project? Platform, etc. Also, selection of the materials used would be helpful. Otherwise, looks like a great start!

REPLY
Future Plans

- “Crowdsourcing” annotations/peer review--targeting experts in the field, and audience participation

- Move to Scalar (http://scalar.usc.edu/): allowing for objects to be tagged with metadata in RDF form to make it interoperable with other NINES projects

- Scalar also provides added functionality for comments to become pages, and for site readers to create their own paths through the project
Social Media & “Chinese Englishmen”

- Twitter account: @CEnglishmen
- Twitter hashtag: #CEnglishmen
More on “Decentralization”

- Work should always be open-access, freely accessible
- In the future, work on an easy-to-navigate mobile view for the project, making commentary easy
Public-Facing Scholarship, the Digital Humanities and the Postcolonial Archive
Goals of *DCE*

- Answer Alan Liu’s call to consider ways DH can integrate cultural criticism into its concerns
- Amy Earhart’s call to encourage more scholars to engage w digital textual recovery
Digitizing "Chinese Englishmen"

Representations of race and empire in the nineteenth century

What is This All About?

Digitizing ‘Chinese Englishmen’ is a project that involves both digitization and academic commentary on the Straits Chinese Magazine, a literary magazine published in colonial Singapore from 1897-1907 by a combination of Southeast Asian-born Anglophone Chinese subjects, European colonial writers and mixed-race Eurasian writers.

Digitizing ‘Chinese Englishmen’ documents how British colonial culture created a group of “Asian professionals” in British Empire, and demonstrates that colonialism was a complex interaction of transnational, intercultural, and cross-racial communities.

Also encourages Dialogue between Victorian Studies and Digital Humanities; Strives to be a Postcolonial Archive

DH recovery for people of color in British Empire
A “Postcolonial” Archive

- Attempts to overcome traces of colonialism that persist in knowledge production
- Not a static project
- Attempts to remain a self-reflexive archive through active engagement
- Issues: lack of funding for recovery efforts. Of 141 DH startup grants awarded by NEH from 2007-2010, only 29 were focused on diverse communities and 16 on diverse community texts.
Public Archives & the Public Humanities

- Russell Berman: humanities scholars “need to explain to policy makers as well as that public we meet every day--our students--the importance of the humanities.”

- Public archival projects--demonstrate the relevance of humanistic thinking to the global community