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DIGITAL ASIA

The Chinese Poster Project: EALC Pedagogy and Digital Media

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How do we make historical documents feel alive? As a faculty member and a research librarian, we frequently encounter tension between remote archival sources and our students' contemporary lives. By creating a web archive, we can make rare objects available to a wide audience while encouraging these audiences to look at them closely and creatively. We have collaborated on creating a digital archive of a small group of rare Chinese political posters from the Republican Era (1912–1949) in the Haverford Quaker & Special Collections. We are including students in all aspects of the process, from development to the implementation of a webpage. This article details the background of the project, the digital communication skills learned by the investigators and student researchers in constructing a webpage featuring these posters, and some plans for the continued use of these posters and the webpage as blended learning resources for the classroom.

Keywords: digital archive; Chinese; posters; visual culture; blended learning

Project Background

This article examines the pedagogical potential for applying digital media technology to the study of archival materials in creation of the "Chinese Poster Project" and its later incarnations. The Chinese Poster Project began with a library presentation, and quickly became embedded in coursework at Bryn Mawr and Haverford College's Bi-College Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC). Because of the immediate and enthusiastic response to every presentation of the physical posters, we quickly became aware of the potential impact we could have by broadening access to these resources by making them available digitally. The main goal of the Chinese Poster Project was, therefore, to digitally archive the William Warder Cadbury poster collection and related ephemera housed in Haverford College's Special Collections, and to create a digital scholarship website for the posters. In addition to making these materials available through the library's online catalog and affiliated digital archives, we are now involved in the second phase of the project where we and students develop supplemental information that contextualizes the images and highlights their linguistic, historical, cultural, and artistic significance. This project highlights the breadth of opportunities offered by collaboration between faculty researchers and librarians, and the link between pedagogy and research.

Like many such departments at colleges and universities around the country, the Bi-College EALC Department is represented by faculty members with diverse disciplinary and historical interests, who focus on China or Japan. Faculty members regularly teach courses with a variety of focuses that include visual culture, film studies, literature, history, political science, and anthropology. With additional support by the libraries (particularly the special collections) at both institutions, students graduating with an EALC major will be exposed to Chinese and Japanese topics from a variety of perspectives, and are encouraged to think about the overlaps and transfers of knowledge and methodology across disciplines.

In developing the Chinese Poster Project, we found that the posters housed in Haverford College's Magill Library were a unique resource for our department's current and future curriculums. The digital scholarship aspect of this project allows

for the unique pedagogical advancement of history, politics, culture, language, and art in the Chinese context. From an academic perspective, utilizing digital tools in the classroom exposes students to a wealth of information that would otherwise be unavailable to them. Yet, we also seek to find ways to encourage students to continue to be attentive to the more traditional practices that highlight the material aspects of primary sources, and to encourage them to consider the historical contexts that shaped the creation of these sources.

This article focuses on the development of the website for the poster project and our plans for future pedagogical uses within the framework of the classroom. We begin with an introduction to the archival materials, the main project goals, and how we plan to achieve them. Next, we discuss the connections that were made through the process of relating this project to EALC pedagogy. Our literature review connects Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to the poster project by detailing the benefits of the inherently flexible nature of the project. In our analysis, we divide student work into two categories (archival student work and senior thesis research) and delineate their respective projects. Finally, we provide an example of how the posters might be used in a pedagogical environment. We also survey some possible future outcomes of the project. The conclusions will detail how the multifaceted nature of the posters (as reflected in the digital project) reveals the importance of their interdisciplinary features, crossing knowledge terrains and institutional boundaries.

Introduction

The posters used in this project come from the collection of William Warder Cadbury (1877–1959). Cadbury, an alumnus of Haverford College, was a physician and Quaker missionary who moved to Canton, China, in 1909 and spent most of his adult life working there. His second wife, Catherine, and their three daughters followed him while he advanced his career as a professor at the Canton Christian College (later Lingnan University). He eventually became Supervisor of Canton Hospital (in 1930). The Japanese military interned Cadbury and his wife for a total of eight months during World War II when Japan invaded Southern China.

Many of the Cadbury family's papers and personal ephemera were left to Haverford College, including a collection of 23 Chinese political posters that William Cadbury may have collected on his travels in China.[1] While we do not know the direct origins of the posters, many of them appear to be thematically linked and printed by the same institutions.

In 2015, the posters were rediscovered in the special collections vault and a "Dig into the Archives" was presented on some initial findings.[2] The posters are housed in Special Collections at Haverford College and were digitized in 2016. Six of the posters are large-format lithographs, with three or more colors, and short, political slogans. Seventeen of the posters are composed of smaller cells creating a larger story (like a page in a comic book), and additional text along with the slogans. These posters represent a period of extraordinary political upheaval involving multiple actors including the Republican (Guomindang) army, the Communist army, warlords, and foreign nations including the United States, Britain and Japan. Therefore, for the most part they are quite violent in nature.

The Chinese Poster Project

The Bi-College collaborative project has expanded in breadth and depth to incorporate not only faculty and librarian collaborations, but also student collaboration in the production of in-depth archival research and current efforts in digital scholarship. The ultimate goal of the project is to synthesize research findings and digital archival materials in one interactive website. While the website is still in early stages of development, the project itself is well underway and a great deal of archival research has been completed. Part of the impetus for this project is that the library will be

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[1] The term "political posters" was chosen as opposed to "propaganda posters" due to the negative connotations associated with propaganda posters. As Xiaobing Tang points out in his discussion about propaganda as an epithet, this is ahistorical. See Xiaobing Tang, *Visual Culture in Contemporary China* (Cambridge University Press, 2015): 20–24.

[2] Haverford College librarians and students hold "Dig into the Archives," or thematic presentations on materials held in the library's special collections.

undergoing renovations until 2019–2020 and we wanted to be certain that the posters would be accessible during this period.

Connections to EALC Pedagogy

The Chinese Poster Project seamlessly connects to the field of EALC, which is inherently interdisciplinary. Courses currently offered by the department and affiliated departments have already given our majors some contextual background to approach these resources from a variety of angles. Regularly offered courses in our curriculum at Bryn Mawr and Haverford include contemporary Japanese print culture, the history of China's revolutions, the rise of China in the twentieth century, advanced Chinese language, and a survey of twentieth century Chinese fiction. These courses, among others, will all benefit from greater access to these holdings. We were inspired by the potential to supplement even more courses if these materials were more easily accessed, by providing the addition of explanatory texts and auxiliary readings that would give contextualizing historical and cultural backgrounds.

The project immediately attracted students from various disciplinary backgrounds to participate in cataloguing these posters and readying them for public presentation. All have an interest in humanities research. Some are native Chinese speakers, and others speak no Chinese. Following the "Dig into the Archives" presentation, several students approached us to express their interest in using some of the posters as the focus of their senior theses. Prior to the recovery of these posters, previous EALC majors had written about posters from the Cultural Revolution, using the digitally archived posters from chineseposters.net (Landsberger and van der Heijden 2017). The increased interest from current students raised our awareness of the unique opportunity to both encourage students on campus to engage more meaningfully with material objects and to make these rare posters accessible to a larger audience of students and researchers. Further, while there has been more significant scholarly work on the posters of the Cultural Revolution, the posters held at Haverford date from several decades earlier, and represent a diversity of topics and political perspectives.

With student interest and the historical significance of these particular posters in mind, we decided to explore the uses of digital technology to expand access to this archive. In addition to our primary goal of making the posters accessible, we hope that the successes and obstacles we encounter during the project will suggest best practices for similar future projects, such as those that facilitate the production of digital archives supplemented with well-placed contextual information. With the assistance of a faculty humanities-based research grant from the Bryn Mawr Blended Learning Institute, we were able to fund the digitization of the posters, as well as hire several student assistants. These students engaged in individual research projects that modeled a range of assignments that, with some modification, could be used in courses and classrooms beyond Haverford and Bryn Mawr – in fact, all over the world. Some of the students hired to work on the poster project facilitated translation and the exchange of information, while others worked closely with senior thesis writers as they developed their research, with the expectation that their discoveries would provide crucial material for the developing website. At the end of the 2017–2018 year, two of our student researchers presented a poster at the AsiaNetwork 2018 conference in Philadelphia. As such, the pedagogy employed for this project varied according to the specific and individual goals of the participants.

Ultimately, through a range of approaches, both student workers and student thesis writers were deeply involved in archival and secondary research on the posters and the posters' contextual role in the history and culture of revolutionary China. Because the product is a website that will include numerous developed essays on various aspects of the project, we expect that the extent of student contributions will not only provide context for the collection, but also inspiration for future research. We see the website as both a repository of the sources themselves (and their supplementary information), and as an ongoing work in progress to which we will add new pieces over the years.

We encountered many pedagogical challenges while working on the poster project. Since the poster project is not based within a traditional classroom setting, we needed to guide students with their chosen projects, largely on a one-on-one basis. Some students had no prior experience with the historical and cultural specifics of

China; other students had a great deal of historical and cultural background but less experience with larger research projects. We had to supervise some of the smallest (but necessary) steps to the largest steps for five students, spanning a year.

Once the project is complete, we have instruction plans for various assignments for use in the classroom. We envision that these assignments could be used in any EALC courses, particularly (but not limited to) those covering the modern period.

Literature Review and Impact on the Chinese Poster Project

Digital scholarship is a useful tool for engaging students in various projects, not only because university students are already so enmeshed in a digital environment, but because they are able to see their investment in the project and the results of their contributions. Work within the digital humanities also adheres to a standard of Universal Design for Learning because of its flexible nature, allowing students of diverse backgrounds and skill sets to demonstrate, and also extend, their unique abilities.[3]

For us, the most prominent aspect of our project was the way it encouraged students to develop and expand their research skills in ways that incorporated both traditional and digital methodologies. Our students spent time exploring the Cadbury collection and sorting through boxes of materials from the more than forty years that the Cadbury family lived in China. Students combed through diaries, letters, photographs, and other ephemera searching for historical information and anything related to the posters or propaganda in general. With no more than a finding aid that gave them some general parameters, they had to think creatively about how to efficiently limit their searches and how to organize the work as they progressed. As such, students needed to educate themselves in three spheres: historical, technical, and library skills.

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[3] As per the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, UDL refers to a "scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that: (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient." http://www.udlcenter.org/advocacy/referencestoUDL/HEOA.

First, students were required to develop their historical knowledge in order to proceed with their research. Students needed a relatively deep understanding of this period in world history, the Cadburys and their role in China, and the history of propaganda, especially with respect to periods of revolution in history. They completed this research in their own time, but with oversight and guidance from faculty and staff. Second, students needed to learn about the technical sphere. Specifically, they had to learn how to digitize materials, how to build a website from a variety of website-building tools, and how to utilize detail-oriented technological skills to gain results. Library staff trained students on basic skills, but the students followed their own interests to expand their knowledge independent of staff. Third, students needed to navigate the library sphere and the specifics associated with research in the main collection, special collections, and online. Students needed to learn about metadata and how to use it to their advantage. Library staff guided students through these terrains, but students alone accomplished the majority of the work. Finally, students synthesized and analyzed information, articulated their ideas, and communicated their conclusions to staff and faculty. Students could choose what piece of the puzzle they wished to work on and how to report this information to us; thus, the project provided flexibility in the ways information was presented. Because the project was not in a traditional classroom setting, this allowed a reduction in instruction barriers, and because one of us is a faculty member and the other is a librarian, this allowed for another level of flexibility – students were able to approach us and communicate with us according to the specific focus of their individual projects. Although the posters themselves are in Chinese, the majority of the archival materials in the Cadbury collection are in English. Students with varying language capabilities could play important and complementary roles in the development of different parts of this project.

Our project is still a work in progress, but we have a number of ideas for ways to maintain UDL, specifically through the use of Scalar (the online publishing platform). Digital media scholar Steve Anderson emphasizes how "…productive points of convergence may be found at the intersection of software development,

user interface and information architecture" (Anderson 2015, 123). He points out that the benefit of using software such as Scalar is facilitated by the links it creates between programmers and humanists. Because Scalar treats web-compatible digital files as equivalent, we believe that using this software will align with our intellectual interests in the materials at hand, and how they will appear digitally. Thus, for example, we hope to interlink the posters to other digitized posters, to digitized archival materials from the Cadbury collection, as well as to digital media such as video and photography. The poster project adheres to the maintenance of the highest achievement standards, but expands the ways that these achievements are defined and measured.

Individual Learning Projects

Our student workers may be divided into two categories: archival researchers and senior-thesis researchers. The former were selected to work on the poster project after responding to advertisements we posted for the job and by showing interest in learning new library-based skills; the latter came to us because they heard about the posters and wanted to work with them for their thesis projects. Two archival researchers went through the Cadbury materials looking for mentions of historical events related to the posters, and for mentions of the posters themselves. One student focused on the Cadbury materials up to 1929 and the other covered the remainder of William Cadbury's personal archives after 1929. One student also digitized many archival gems for future use in the website, such as letters referencing the historical events found in the posters, and photographs taken by Cadbury documenting violence between the Communists and Nationalists. Their workflows were similar: we had students complete spreadsheets with their findings, prepare weekly reports, attend meetings, and create final reports (oral or written).

Our students wanted a deep understanding of various aspects of the project at hand in order to help with the archival research. The students' work was therefore primarily to expand the contextual information surrounding the acquisition of the posters, but also to suggest why the Cadbury's may have been interested in collecting and preserving these posters in particular.

One student worker was hired through the grant to conduct a broad search of the Cadbury papers from the period that roughly aligned with the dates on the posters in the collection. The goal was to investigate how these posters came into Cadbury's possession. We were also keenly aware of the benefits of perusing the diaries and letters, because of the potential for the kinds of felicities and discoveries that only come from hands-on research with materials. Unlike a keyword search, this kind of assignment encouraged attentiveness to connections that have not previously been predicted. The researcher was urged to think creatively and to treat resources with alertness. During the course of this research, for example, one student discovered small pictorial leaflets pasted to the endpapers of a journal, which not only underscored Cadbury's interest in collecting visual matter, but also the ubiquity of such ephemera which would not be obvious to the history-book reader. This kind of discovery would not have been possible if the student had approached the project with a narrow and exclusive focus.

A student who planned to write a senior thesis about several posters from the collection also took on the time-consuming task of transcribing the text from all of the posters into a carefully maintained database. In addition to helping us collect our metadata, this student laid the foundation for future projects in Chinese language courses and for courses in history, literature, and the history of art. This student spent time together with the faculty investigator, looking at corollary databases of posters, most notably the aforementioned website, *chineseposters.net*, as well as other sites hosted at institutions and in private collections. We also discussed different approaches to the project and possible paths of inquiry that could be developed into research projects. Among the topics discussed were, for example, the history of animal imagery in posters, the history of printing technology and how the technology and materials entered early twentieth-century China, and the overlap between commercial artwork and political artwork at the time. In our conception of the Chinese Poster Project, we were firm in our desire to have the text available to readers in Chinese characters, in Romanization (*pinyin*), and in English translation.

This would allow the historical researcher to search for specific keywords in either Chinese or English, and it would allow the language learner to work on translation projects without the obstacle of trying to read handwriting.

Finally, we had a student worker spend several weeks writing blog posts that analyzed a significant historical event detailed in several of the posters, as an opportunity to contemplate a historical moment through visual culture. We conceived of this assignment as an occasion to develop content for the website (in this case, a narrative about one historical moment that several posters respond to) as well as an example of the kind of research and critical-making assignment that future teachers could assign to individuals or small groups in class.[4] What would students be asked to create as a final outcome? What resources would they be expected to use? How long would it take an individual student to complete such an assignment? We learned, as we did from several other assignments, that clear and direct instructions would allow students greater flexibility in defining a research question and then executing the project.

Example of an Assignment using the Chinese Poster Project

Adhering to the guidelines presented by Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) and critical making, the following represents an example of an assignment using the Chinese Poster Project. In a classroom setting, students would need laptops in order to complete this project. The poster is reprinted below. The Chinese Romanization reads "Qian nian de 'wu sa!'" which loosely translates to "Last year's May Thirtieth" and refers to the May Thirtieth Movement of 1925, which was an anti-imperialist trade movement that led to a violent shooting in Shanghai.

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[4] For more information on critical-making as a concept, see Matt Ratto "Critical Making," in Open Design Now: Why Design Cannot Remain Exclusive, eds. Bas van Abel, Lucas Evers, Roel Klaassen, Peter Troxler (The Netherlands: BIS Publishers, 2011): 203–209; Matt Ratto and Stephen Hoekema, "Flwr Pwr: Tending the Walled Garden," Walled Garden, eds. Annet Dekker, and Annette Wolfsberger (Rotterdam: Virtueel Platform, 2009): 51–60; Jessica S. Barness and Amy Papaelias (2015), "Critical Making at the Edges," Visual Culture 49 no. 3 (2015): 5–11; Garnet Hertz (ed.) Conversations in Critical Making, CTheory Books (2015): 1–6.

(qian nian de 'wu sa!' ca. 1927)

1. Clear goals: Students will be asked to work together in small groups (two or more, depending on the size of the class). A digital file of one or more poster(s) will be available through the library's catalog. A Romanization and a translation of the poster will be provided. Using a combination of an Omeka website and the Neatline plug-in (which can be transferred into Scalar systems and has presumably been covered already in class), students will take the image and create a mapped page with at least three points. Some class time may have to be set aside to give students a quick tutorial on how to use this technology. It is also important at this stage to make clear that the assignment is not going to be evaluated on technological fluency, and that it is simply a necessary tool for presenting information in a meaningful way. This is why the rubric, detailed in the next section, will help to define the goals of the project.

   Each of the Neatline points must relate the imagery found on the poster to background historical information. Students will be asked to write short essays about their findings. Thus, the goals for this particular project roughly follow the instructions for the essay itself, which are to:

   a. Identify the objects or people on the poster, which have been clearly labeled by the poster's artist;
   b. Write a descriptive paragraph explaining the relationship between the objects/entities;
   c. Conduct a visual analysis of the poster itself: aspects such as scale, color, directionality, and composition should be discussed and interpreted; and
   d. Comment on the relationship between the poster and its historical context using two textual sources.

2. Adequate preparation: Working with students to find resources on the topic using an online library catalogue is paramount to success. So is an open dialogue with students on the materials at hand, from historical and visual perspectives. Students will need to look at scholarly material, and learn to distinguish between reliable and unreliable sources. A quick description or brief starting bibliography might be necessary, depending on the level of the course. Students

will also need clear and precise guidelines for how their work will be evaluated. We have found that a rubric is helpful in such cases. In this example, the rubric might be divided into three sections: visual analysis, historical context, and critical interpretation. Within each category, the rubric will distinguish between baseline fulfillment of goals, and work that either exceeds or fails to meet that baseline.

3. Appropriate methods: A handout will be useful in this case. While students work on their Omeka site, they can use the handout to help them define the most salient aspects of their research. This can include basic information such as dates, locations, and questions about each of the people in the poster. Who is the man with his arm in the air? What is he holding? What is he wearing? Why is this significant? And so on. In sum, the methods will be historically and visually based.

4. Significant results: The results from this project will be an Omeka webpage and the necessary written work to go along with the Neatline plug-in. Students can choose how they wish to present the material to the class. Do they want a traditional essay above or below the image of the poster, or do they want to be more creative?

5. Effective presentation: Students will be expected to share their results with their classmates. They will need to share a link to their sites and give a short, oral presentation on their findings and thought processes. This stage of the project could be construed as a "draft" stage of the project, and each group can expect to elicit critical feedback and suggestions from their instructor as well as their peer group.

6. Reflective critique: Students and faculty will be able to respond to the presentations and have fruitful discussions about the projects. This could involve one or a combination of: class discussion, individual consultations between groups and faculty, and virtual responses using the comments function. A revised final version of the website that reflects and incorporates the critique would be optimal.

Planned Outcomes of the Chinese Poster Project

It is our hope that students will be able to learn about a significant time in China's revolutionary period from the final version of the digital humanities website, which will include the detailed scans of the posters and analytic essays on various historical and cultural topics. The visual aspect of the website is vital to the project because we want to incorporate history, politics, culture, language, and art in a Chinese context. Thus, each poster will have sections with transcriptions (for linguistic advantages), translations, and some historical and cultural background, where relevant. The publishers and publishing context will also be included when possible. In some cases, posters contain very clear historical moments, as they are printed reactions to such moments in time. The website will be useful in a classroom setting due to the visual nature of the posters and ephemera from the archives. For instance, we envision the site including links to other items in the archive, displayed in a user-friendly, seamless manner. We envision displaying background information and links to lengthier essays discussing the posters more thoroughly. This aspect is crucial to our belief that these posters come from a very specific historical and cultural moment, and that the thoughtful scrutiny of who their audience was is just as telling as the analysis of the images themselves. Many of the posters depict violent scenes, which can be easily misconstrued even with the text translated. Thus, by seeing the risks that attend to imprecise research, students play an active role in learning about the benefits of rigorous scholarship in the construction of meaning. The students are also involved in the act of making because they all understand their role in the future website and how it will likely engage viewers.

The potential range of instructional possibilities for this project is large: outside of the sphere of Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges, this website could be used in any educational space with an internet connection. As a resource for classroom assignments, we hope that the posters and the website supplementary materials will facilitate research projects that allow a greater number of students and researchers to engage with these materials. As with the assignment provided above, we hope students will be able to take the materials and create their own projects using

methods set forth by the website. For instance, some of the posters are packed with information, much like a comic strip. With translations provided, students could develop their own creative project that engages in the act of making but also with in-depth research. Our website could never include all of the possible variables available to students and we are open to viewing student work and adding more materials to the site as necessary. For advanced language students, faculty could potentially create translation assignments that incorporate the visual elements of the posters. We already see the posters used in classes covering modern periods in Chinese and Japanese history, visual studies, and Chinese language classes, but we could see this site adding visual and historical elements to courses on world history, political science, and art history to name a few.

Finally, a note should be made that we also envision our website used as an auxiliary project to other existing sites (such as MIT's Visualizing Cultures site). This project, by nature, represents a single body of archived materials contained in one space; it is on a small scale, but still valuable for digital humanities research.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the digital scholarship aspect of the Chinese Poster Project was set in motion primarily because of our conviction that these rare posters were a significant resource that would be meaningful to students and researchers working across a wide range of interests. By taking advantage of innovative digital tools, we hope to broaden the accessibility of our resources to a wider community beyond that of specialists and even the classroom. The Chinese Poster Project allows for the unique pedagogical advancement of history, politics, culture, language, and art in Chinese and Japanese contexts. From an academic perspective, utilizing digital tools in the classroom exposes students to a wealth of information that would otherwise be unavailable to them, or difficult to find and access. It allows students to develop creative projects that engage in the act of making, and to think critically about the historian and archivist's role in the dissemination of information of a politically nuanced nature. Even the simplest decisions, such as how to group the posters together into subcategories, will require students to think meaningfully

about the many variables that attach to how we think about and present primary documents.

Because of its flexible nature, the Chinese Poster Project can be used in a diverse array of assignments and classroom activities. Working in small groups on a research project will also encourage students to contribute their strengths, and to develop new skills and methods. Finally, the incorporation of digital technologies into our pedagogical practice encourages greater student-led participation in assignments and assessments, while still allowing for close collaboration and supervision from faculty and library staff. We envision many future conversations about the archival materials and the significance of ephemera in shaping political history. Most significantly to us, the completion of this project will mean that anyone with an Internet connection can take a virtual walk through a rare, fascinating collection and make new discoveries about this unique moment in Chinese history.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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