Cultural Diversity in LIS Research: National and International Communities as Context for the Study of Ethics, Policy, and Education

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ABSTRACT
This panel will showcase current information ethics, information policy, and library and information science (LIS) education projects from around the world to compare and contrast the current state of LIS research in the global information community. The juxtaposition of selected international projects will highlight the roles that national and international cultural contexts can play in LIS research, policy, and practice.

Keywords  
Information policy, international issues, library & information science, information ethics, LIS education.

INTRODUCTION
UNESCO (The United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has identified freedom of information as a fundamental human right and recognizes libraries and library services as “essential components” for increasing information access “both for the public at large and specialized groups” (UNESCO, 2014). In 2014, the World Library and Information Congress launched its Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, which “marks a complementary and intersecting initiative to assert and advocate the role of the profession in cultures and societies around the world” (Witt, 2015). Moreover, with increasing economic globalization, information policy today often crosses geographic borders: “Information policies have a global reach, and, as technology has enabled us to reach seamlessly across the world, the data traces we leave along our way present a digital goldmine of information” (Unsworth, 2014, p. 47).

Still, despite this growing global information environment, libraries and library services vary radically from country to country. There is no one “library” writ large, and different countries and different cultures have much to learn from each other about the ways in which library services, information access, and information policy intersect and play out in different cultural contexts.

International information issues represent a long-standing interest within the ASIS&T community. Recent efforts to update ASIS&T’s name reflect, in part, a growing international membership and interest among members. However, although “From 2012 to 2013 the number of ASIS&T members from outside the United States increased approximately 18%” (Sonnenwald, 2014, p. 34), this still means that the large majority of ASIS&T members come from the U.S. and that we can do much more to broaden the international appeal and impact of our organization.

This panel, jointly hosted by the Center for the Study of Libraries, Information, & Society (CSLIS) of Drexel University in the United States and by the Research Institute of Library & Information Science (RILIS) of Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) in China, will showcase cutting-edge information policy, information literacy, and library service projects in different countries and across international boundaries. The juxtaposition of these projects will highlight...
the roles that national and international cultural contexts can play in library and information science (LIS) research, policy, and practice. Each of the projects to be discussed is both a unique product of its local, regional, or national context, yet each also provides a path for understanding the role of information research in the international context.

**PANEL FORMAT**
The panel will begin with eight-minute overviews of each project, including discussion of the cultural context and of the influence of local, regional, or national cultural context on the work. Presenters will also emphasize the impact of their projects on society from different angles and through different community approaches.

Following the project overviews, the panel moderator will ask panel members to respond to the following questions: 1) What aspects of your work are unique to the cultural context in which it takes place? 2) What aspects do you think are widely applicable across geopolitical and cultural boundaries? 3) How does local or regional or national information policy affect your project?

Next, we will lead a discussion with the audience. Discussion questions will include: 1) What role does cultural context play in your own information research and/or practice? 2) How does local, regional, national, or even global information policy affect your work? 3) How can we encourage our students, colleagues, and clients to adopt an informed personal philosophy of globalization? 4) How can we work to broaden ASIS&T’s international membership and reach?

**THE PROJECTS**

**PROJECT 1: CHOICES Uganda: Artfully Disseminating Health Information (Deborah Turner)**

Can information professionals help mitigate problems that arise from having an inadequate health infrastructure in a resource-poor context? CHOICES Uganda involves a multi-disciplinary effort to improve maternal and child health in Uganda by ensuring residents’ access to health information. Professionals and researchers in health sciences, library and information science, and performing arts in Uganda and the United States are finding ways to collaborate with community members and organizations despite low literacy, small if any Uganda Community Library member library collections, and a cultural preference for oral information. CHOICES aims to measure the impact of and ensure a sustainable approach for creating vignettes (short stage plays) that can be performed to entertain and inform community members regardless of accent, language, or literacy practice in contexts where they can be adapted and used.

**PROJECT 2: Current Work of the RILIS (Research Institute of Library & Information Science at Sun Yat-sen University)**

To give the audience a strong understanding of the current state of LIS research and of library policy development in China, Research Fellows from the RILIS will provide brief overviews of major ongoing RILIS initiatives. These include:


Chinese modern librarianship bears a distinct social, historical and cultural background that makes it different from U.S. or other national public library cultures that champion information rights. Before the 21st Century, the Chinese library world as a whole was unfamiliar with and even hostile toward the principles of equal, free, and inclusive access to libraries. The turn of the century brought with it an increasing national consciousness of civil rights and the public’s rights to access cultural services, including a national Library Rights Movement. The presentation will explain this national movement and show how the RILIS has employed educational and grass-roots efforts to become one of the most important national campaigns for equal and free information access for the Chinese people.

“Drafting the Guangzhou Public Libraries Legislation,” led by Catherine Qiong Tang

Library legislation can guarantee universal, equal, open, and convenient access to public library services. China has no national library legislation but does have some regional laws mandating the provision of public library services. The latest one, the Guangzhou Public Libraries Legislation passed in 2015, was drafted by and is promoted by the RILIS. This newly implemented law for the Guangzhou city public library stands as a hallmark for combining academic research, policy-making, and community input to create meaningful impact on the lives of everyday citizens.

“Construction and Organization of Special Collections,” led by Layna Lei Wang

Special collections are the most characteristic and personalized collections in modern libraries, and they have important historical and cultural significance to their communities. Cooperating with the SYSU Libraries, the RILIS conducts ongoing research into the construction, organization and digitization of special collections. These efforts have resulted in the development of several specialized databases and a conference focused on the cooperative development and sharing of Chinese resources among East Asian literature collections. Overall, the projects seek to bring together academic researchers with practicing academic librarians and to use scholarly research to guide the design and delivery of academic library resources.

“Updating Preservation and Conservation Education and Training,” led by Eva Yi Zhou

Preservation and conservation (P&C) refer to the set of activities that assure long-term access to the physical and intellectual contents of collections in libraries, archives and other cultural institutions. In international academic circles it is the official viewpoint that preservation should be distinguished from conservation. However, Chinese information professionals usually consider them to be the same. Conservation in China has a long history, and the
accumulated fund of knowledge and experience about the repair of damaged documents maintains a tremendous impact on modern Chinese P&C education and training, which tends to pay more attention to remedial measures than to preventive measures. The RILIS is working to promote new methods and procedures of the international preservation profession and to become a national leader in P&C education. As a result, research is directly influencing the development of the modern P&C profession in China.

**PROJECT 3: Working across Borders: Ethical Issues in Heritage and Digital Rights (Jenny Bossaller)**

Just as they regain their heritage and intellectual property, post-colonial nations are at risk of losing it to corporate or business interests through digitization efforts. Digital projects can bring diverse people and groups together around a common cause—for instance, creating new ways of presenting or working with knowledge, or solving common or global problems. However, such projects have inherent ethical issues regarding presentation of content, control, and ownership. Digital Colonialism refers to exploitation through language, platforms, or code that perpetuates domination or hegemony in the digital world. Digital inclusion, in contrast, means ensuring equal representation on the Internet. These two ideas will provide the basis for a presentation on ethics of digital projects with developing nations or indigenous people. It will also look to examples of problems in international digital projects in terms of national heritage and digital rights.

**PROJECT 4: The Ongoing Role of Libraries and Librarians in Supporting Civil Society (Kristene Unsworth)**

Libraries and librarians have long served as resources to help individuals access information and open avenues for empowerment. This research project examines the ongoing work of libraries and librarians to protect the right to information through the development and enactment of information policies. Through a comparative analysis of the UN post-2015 framework to guide development worldwide (UN, 2105) and US information policy as it relates to national and community development we ask: How are the official statements of support for civil society, such as President Obama’s declaration of Promise Zones (160 Cong. Rec. S493, 2013) throughout the U.S. and the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (see: UNMC, 2105), being enacted through library engagement with communities? Ongoing projects and the policies undergirding them are presented, and through a comparative analysis of how international, national, and local information policy becomes citizen action, the project investigates the interaction between policy and life.

**THE RESEARCH CENTERS**

*The Center for the Study of Libraries, Information, & Society (CSLIS)*

Headquartered at Drexel University’s College of Computing & Informatics, CSLIS seeks to connect people and information through technology and to make important contributions to library and information science research, teaching, and practice.

**Research Institute of Library & Information Science (RILIS)**

SYSU’s RILIS devotes itself to theoretical and applied research on library rights and ethics, the history of libraries and library science, information resources sharing, reorganization and protection of ancient books, library and information science education, information literacy education, and preservation and conservation. RILIS aspires to benefit and support society, people and communities.

**THE PANEL MEMBERS**

Denise E. Agosto (moderator) is Professor in the College of Computing & Informatics at Drexel University and Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Libraries, Information, & Society (CSLIS). Her research focuses on youths’ information behaviour and practices, teens’ use of social media, and diversity issues in public library services.

Bella Jing Zhang (panelist) is Associate Professor and Vice Dean of the School of Information Management (SIM), SYSU. She also serves as a research fellow in CSLIS, Drexel. She conducts research in information and society, book history, and LIS education. She was a visiting scholar in Canada and the USA in 2010, 2014 and 2015.

Kristene Unsworth (panelist), Assistant Professor in the College of Computing & Informatics at Drexel University. She is the current chair of the ASIS&T Special Interest Group on Information Ethics and Policy (IEP). She is also a CSLIS Steering Committee member. Her research engages questions of information ethics and policy as they relate to individual and community involvement in civil society.

Jenny Bossaller (panelist) is an Assistant Professor of Library and Information Science, Project Head of African Studies Projects, and Advisory Board Member of the Digital Humanities Commons at the University of Missouri. Her research broadly encompasses constraints on information flow, covering policy, attitudes, and related social phenomena.

Deborah Turner (panelist) is an Assistant Professor at the College of Computing & Informatics, Drexel University, and a CSLIS Steering Committee Member. Her research focuses on document studies and information behaviour, especially involving oral information. She studies on how people interact with information in order to change their quality of life. She was a Fulbright Fellow in Finland from 2008–2009.

Catherine Qiong Tang (panelist), Associate Professor of SIM, SYSU. She conducts research in the evaluation of information services and resources, information policy, and collection development in the digital world. She is a visiting scholar in USA from 2015 to 2016.

Eva Yi Zhou (panelist), Associate Professor of SIM, SYSU. Her current research focuses on preservation and conservation, public archival policy, the social roles of...
libraries and archives, and historical literature. She was a visiting scholar in Canada from 2014 to 2015.

**Layna Lei Wang** (panelist), Associate Research Librarian and Head of the Department of Special Collections of SYSU Libraries. Her research fields include the history of libraries and library science, historical philology, bibliography, the science of editions, and Sino-foreign exchange of historical documents. She was a visiting scholar in the USA in 2011.

**REFERENCES**


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Additional authors include: **Catherine Qiong Tang**, Associate Professor, School of Information Management, Sun Yat-sen University; **Eva Yi Zhou**, Associate Professor, School of Information Management, Sun Yat-sen University; and **Layna Lei Wang**, Associate Research Librarian and Head of the Department of Special Collections, Sun Yat-sen University Libraries.