Chapter 9

Digital Forensic Investigation of the Xiyu Pagoda Lighthouse

Richard W. L. Wong
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Anthony K. H. Leung
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Brad New
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Steve Ching
City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a lighthouse heritage experiential education project conducted by Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong. The project initiative aims to connect students to archival collections with the aid of digital technology. The research, or “digital forensic investigation,” was conducted on the Xiyu Pagoda Lighthouse, a demolished lighthouse that once existed on Xiyu Island, Penghu, Taiwan. The first stages of research have been framed within a six-step “forensic investigation” model. Proceeding research developed from and beyond the model and focused on resolving the inconsistencies encountered in the initial research. Digital humanities tools were utilized for reconstruction and representation purposes, accumulating evidence through an iterative process between primary and authoritative sources, and first-hand observation. Beyond demonstrating the way in which technology can be employed to enhance historical research, the aim of this chapter is to illustrate how library initiatives can serve to connect students to archival collections.

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INTRODUCTION

Books are lighthouses erected in the great sea of time - Edwin Percy Whipple (1871) “Literature and Life” p 38

Libraries have devoted considerable amounts of resources and efforts to digitise historical works and innovate discovery tools over the last two decades. It is now much easier for students to search and access archival collections anywhere and anytime. But, it is still rare for students to browse historical materials. For libraries with rich collections of cultural heritage information, librarians are seeking new ways of engagement by connecting archival collections to discovery, innovation, and community-related learning activities in order to retain their value for the next generations. Challenges arise due to the chronological gap between student experience and historical texts, which may give the impression of irrelevancy to students. Despite this chronological gap, the treasures of knowledge from the past and cultural heritage are still available and always waiting for the next generation to discover. In today’s open and ever-growing technological environment, students nowadays are digital natives. They are self-motivated to explore new digital applications and generally competent in using them. The question, then, is how to encourage and maintain student engagement with historical materials by leveraging their skills and interest in digital technology?

In response to this, the Run Run Shaw Library, City University of Hong Kong, has developed the Lighthouse Heritage Research Connections (LHRC) Project. As an extracurricular learning program not directly associated with any specific course or major, students are free to contribute to the LHRC Project as they desire. Some students who got involved volunteered themselves, while others were recommended by course instructors. The students who participated came from a range of different disciplines, including; Communications and Media (COM), Architecture and Civil Engineering (ACE), School of Creative Media (SCM), and the College of Business (CB). Rather than being motivated by grades, student contributors are generally motivated by the fulfilment of conducting research in an open and free environment, and the achievements that arise from this. The on-going service-learning initiative was developed with the aim of empowering students to become active contributors to information ecosystems. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework emphasises the importance of students advancing from being consumers of information, to creators of information (ACRL 2015). The LHRC Project brings students from various academic departments together to conduct research into historical lighthouses, with an emphasis on the use of new media and digital tools. Using digital technology, especially dealing with the uncertainties
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