

Chinese Archival Practices: The Impact of Culture and Government Policies on the Research of American-based Historians in Chinese Archives

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Abstract: As of April 2010, there is no set of international standards for archival practices set forth by the International Council of Archives or other organization that must be followed by all countries. The lack of uniform operating principles affects scholars who utilize archives working overseas, such as historians, who must not only overcome cultural differences but also abide by a system of unfamiliar archival policies. One particular set of users that often encounter differences in national archival practices is historians of China based professionally in the United States. There is much archival and historical literature regarding archival practices in the People's Republic of China from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) to the present detailing its progression from palace to nation-wide system. A number of the pieces include comparisons and critiques between Chinese and American archival practices that ultimately point to differences rooted in cultural thinking and government policies. This paper reviews articles pertaining to the relationship between archivists and historians, conflicts between both parties, American and Chinese archival practices, and personal commentaries as a foundation from which to gather anecdotal evidence from United States-based historians about their experiences using Chinese archives. By comparing past literature with recent testimonies, the author hopes to identify potential solutions and trends that will enable United States-based historians to use Chinese archives more effectively and for Chinese archivists to understand their American users.

About the author:

Eugenia Kim is a graduate student at the University at Albany pursuing her MS in Information Science. She is a 2010 Career Enhancement Fellow through the Association of Research Libraries and served her internship at Columbia University Libraries. Her current research interests include preservation of digital media, online digital repositories, performing arts archives, and user-initiated archiving of video gameplay.