# Archival Dispersion and Virtual Reunification: Toward a Framework for Representing the Complexities and Dimensions of Dispersion

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**Abstract:** Virtual reunification is the strategy of putting together physically dispersed heritage collections in order to produce a consolidated, digitized representation of scattered artifacts, literary and artistic works, and/or archival records attributable to a single origin or common provenance. Scholars of digitization project that the growing trend towards virtual reunification will continue given its capacity to facilitate compromise and expediency for repositories unable or unwilling to de-accession or repatriate their pieces of a larger inter-institutional collection. Among many pre-conditions for reunification projects, the tracing of the dispersion of the materials—their provenance in archival terms—is among the most

Stories of dispersion, however, are neither simple nor straightforward. I will focus on analyzing the dispersion narrative as well as identifying the various elements that archivists must consider when constituting the "whole" collection. My presentation draws insights from the Dean C. Worcester photographic collections, a set of dispersed ethnographic images that have been the subject of previous efforts to provide unified access since the 1970s. The many paths of dispersion that the Worcester images took in the past shape virtual reunification efforts in the present. My presentation will report on the ongoing development of a model that will help archivists to understand and capture the various dimensions of dispersion as they relate to archival photographic images being considered for online reunification.

**About the author:**

*Ricardo L. Punzalan* is an assistant professor at the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies where he teaches courses in archival studies, digital curation, and research methods. His area of research includes understanding the relationship of archives and collective memory, the politics and dynamics of digitization decision-making in collaborative and inter-institutional settings, and the uses and users of digitized archival images. He holds a Ph.D. in Information from the University of Michigan's School of Information. In addition to an MLIS from the University of the Philippines, he completed two certificates of graduate studies at Michigan, one in Science, Technology, and Society (STS) and another in Museum Studies. Prior to his doctoral work at

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