



THE CHINESE ARCHIVE:

A Pocket Manual

Yasser Ali Nasser and Matthew Wong Foreman



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CLIR Publication 188



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Council on Library and Information Resources
Alexandria, VA, USA



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Introduction

Since the 1980s, archives in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have undergone rapid professionalization. The central government has introduced legislation, auditing standards, and technologies to preserve collections and train archivists. Universities across the country have embraced documents sourced from the everyday lives of individuals, rather than relying merely on official sources. Hobbyists and professional collectors have exhibited their treasures in museums and libraries as well as digitally. Rare books and historical documents have never been so popular or profitable, with a vibrant online economy dedicated to auctioning items to the highest bidder.

Despite these positive developments, Chinese archives are in a state of profound uncertainty and flux, if not full-blown crisis. In the name of protecting national security, the central government under Xi Jinping has imposed regulations that restrict scholarly activity—from closing off archival material related to post-1949 history to allowing only approved individuals into important institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These restrictions have affected international and domestic scholarship alike and reflect increasingly sophisticated state censorship and archival meddling. Combined with digitization efforts that have purposefully “sanitized” state records, rumors about initiatives to tamper with historical materials have led to a chill in academic activity and the balkanization of historical collections into an ever-increasing number of for-profit ventures. Rather than reform and regulate, the Chinese government has opted to ban and censor, prompting a proliferation in black markets and an accompanying crisis of authenticity (Carter 2020). These changes have fundamentally altered how researchers (including academic scholars, government researchers, and journalists, among others) understand, consume, and convey the intricacies of Chinese history, culture, society, economics, and politics.

This report seeks to shed light on the practical implications of the rapid changes that have transformed how Chinese archives function vis-à-vis state and society. In this report, the authors have three major goals: (1) to place these changes in their historical context, analyzing shifting political changes and their impact on Chinese informational culture and considering how these changes reflect wider trends in global informational networks outside China; (2) to address issues related to research, asking how China's archival crisis has impacted research (both domestic and international), if at all, and asking whether this crisis has changed the

nature of graduate and professional training; and (3) to provide practical advice for researchers on how to effectively navigate the new Chinese archival landscape and to offer alternative strategies for conducting research work on and in China.

Those with a vested interest in understanding the PRC must consider new methods of research, new technologies for informational exchange, new approaches to the study of China, and changes to the way research is taught and funded. The challenge of the Chinese archival crisis is therefore much larger than merely an increased difficulty in obtaining sources for research. Until we can develop a sustainable approach for reckoning with this crisis, the future of research work on China will be imperiled, as will our capacity to understand the emerging informational regimes in countries like the PRC.

A NOTE ON PRIVACY

This report draws on 16 interviews with researchers and scholars in the United States and the People's Republic of China; roughly a third of the participants were Chinese scholars working either in the United States or in mainland China. All participants were historians with varying degrees of familiarity with the Chinese archival system. Given the tense political climate, we have opted to anonymize interviewees. All interviewees were fully briefed on the aims and purposes of this project to ensure voluntary participation and informed consent. The questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1. Our practical guide to archival research found in Appendix 2 also benefited from the advice of several Chinese scholars who, though reluctant to participate in the survey, were happy to share their understanding of how to navigate archives in China.

A Brief History of Chinese Archiving from Imperial Times to the Republic

As with most early states, the first dynastic governments in China began keeping collections and records of their various activities for the purpose of cataloging and referencing them later. These collections were consulted by early dynastic historians such as Sima Qian and were likely largely comprised of genealogies, taxation records, and government edicts. In imperial China, archives played a central role in governmental legitimacy, with official historians establishing the conventions of what we now know as official dynastic histories, or “Orthodox Histories” [正史]. These official histories were used by imperial courts, especially from the seventh century onward, to connect the regime at the time with historical dynasties and legendary ones alike, thereby allowing imperial polities to present themselves as natural and legitimate successors (Ye and Esherick 1996, 5).

The emphasis on state legitimacy and history’s importance as a political utility meant that archives in China belonged to governing polities that were less concerned with preservation and historical accuracy than with curation. For over two millennia, China maintained a historical tradition of destroying any surviving records of the previous dynasty once official histories sanctioned by the imperial court were compiled. By contrast, French archives, for example, boast a depth and breadth to their historical records going back nearly a thousand years due to the liberation of private and institutional records after the French Revolution. In this way, state, church, and civil documents are largely divorced from political legitimacy and have benefited countless generations of historians as a result. Likewise, Japan and India also have relatively robust traditions of diversely owned private, religious, and corporate archives with full public access that have allowed researchers to better map out the texture of life in medieval and early modern societies.

Though historians of ancient, medieval, and early modern China have found a variety of ways to make up for the lack of detailed records, there is no doubt that ecclesiastical, monastic, manorial, and other types of records have no real equivalent in Chinese archives. This is because state dominance and state legitimacy have always played a central role in Chinese informational culture. Early modern dynasties in China relied on official histories as sole reference sources—an issue that today continues to vex historians who focus on premodern China. Prior to the Qing Dynasty (1636–1911), historians—who were almost always government officials—lacked the type of systemic archival records found in Japan,

Turkey, or the United Kingdom. There were a few exceptions to this, most notably files that were either purposely hidden by officials or found by later archaeologists, such as the Dunhuang manuscripts and Ming records that were collected by the Kangxi emperor. As a result, historians today have largely had to rely on archaeological, foreign, non-official records along with official histories to reconstruct societal experiences and change in earlier dynasties (Bartlett 1980, 26; Moseley 1987, 137). Changing political circumstances in the late Qing dynasty were also not conducive to the preservation of older records. From the early nineteenth century onward, internal rebellions, millenarian movements, and foreign incursions devastated local and central archives. The Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864) and the Boxer Uprising (1899–1901), in particular, led to the loss of innumerable documents. By 1901, despite official edicts promulgated to “modernize” the imperial state’s infrastructure, less than half of the records of the Six Ministries remained. Following this, the Qing state was slow to update its practices, largely ignoring old records and archives as it confronted multiple crises in the lead-up to its dissolution in 1911 (Ye and Esherick 1996, 6).

In the chaos after the dynasty’s collapse, many old records were sold for scrap or wastepaper. The new Republican government lacked the resources and centralized authority to stem this. Nevertheless, some efforts were made to modernize archival preservation: by the late 1920s, the Palace Museum and its documents department were established to help collect and preserve imperial records. Many of the institutions that historians now use to research the Qing dynasty—namely the First Historical Archives in Beijing, official collections at Beijing and Qinghua University, and Academia Sinica in Taipei—are products of these efforts of early twentieth-century scholars and officials, though efforts to preserve archival materials outside Beijing largely failed.

The Republican government’s modernization efforts had mixed results. The records for the Republican period are remarkably robust and the most easily accessible of all periods in Chinese history. Nevertheless, contrary to other parts of the world, these modernization efforts did not do much to alter informational culture in post-dynastic China. While the state adopted European, and particularly German, approaches to archival management and science from the late 1920s onward, official approaches to archiving remained relatively pragmatic and tied to the general goal of state-building. The state encouraged ministries to discard files deemed too sensitive and to preserve certain types of files over others. For example, circulars and minutes of meetings were prioritized over specific debates or reports on the economy and policy choices, with the former being selected

for permanent retention while the latter would be destroyed after a certain period. Again, this served certain state prerogatives: it was necessary to understand the process by which laws and central decisions were made to create institutional knowledge, whereas more transitory reports on the economy and surveys would only be relevant for a specific period of time (Ye and Esherick 1996, 8–12). This policy set a precedent that has continued until today: the state chooses what archival information is important and what is not, and determines the transparency of archival institutions accordingly, all the while leaving increasingly little room for private organizations or individuals to contribute to a more textured and granular archival environment. This informational culture governs archival preservation, research, and access in contemporary China.

Archives in the PRC: Legal Frameworks and Transparency after “Opening Up”

After the Communist Revolution in 1949 and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), several generations of scholars outside China found themselves locked out of the country and unable to even attempt to navigate the already difficult research environment that their predecessors had experienced in the early twentieth century. Although the extent to which the PRC was a “closed” society has been largely overemphasized, given that many so-called “fellow travelers” and designated “friends” of the PRC were consistently invited to tour and even live in the country, archival research remained entirely off-limits.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) remained as committed as the Kuomintang before them to using the archives to aid in their quest for state-building and the construction of competent institutions. Unlike the Kuomintang, however, the CCP also benefited from having relatively little resistance to their newly established administration of the country, and thus had carte blanche to both make and implement policies. Archival access became even more limited, even to domestic researchers, who had to go through many bureaucratic hurdles just to use basic materials (Ye and Esherick 1996, 12–14).

By the early 1950s, the CCP proclaimed the construction of a “New China,” and as with any new government, information became a central tool for shaping this ideological narrative. Contrary to popular opinion, the CCP did not necessarily have a hostile relationship with Chinese history per se; indeed, much of the PRC’s statecraft showed a remarkable sense of continuity with policies that the Kuomintang had put in place, with many administrators, bureaucrats, and technical personnel continuing to work in their old capacities within the new state. To that end, the CCP built on their predecessors’ initial modernization of the archival system and sciences, with new legal rules and regulations established for information access in the mid-1950s. These laws furthered centralization of information access and restricted public access to post-1949 documentation. Documents were placed in the control of the Public Security Bureau, which was established to use archival documents to build case files for “anti-revolutionary elements” in Chinese society and to better understand the mechanics of the previous government.

This informational ideology was officially dubbed as the archiving of “revolutionary history.” In line with previous dynasties’ belief

that historical narratives should serve the political legitimacy of any governmental system, the CCP worked to promote the world-historical importance of their own revolution and the subsequent transformation of Chinese society, intent on preserving the steps party and state had taken to secure its revolution and documenting the participation of the masses—however compelled—in revolutionary activities. By 1958, the CCP built a system of government institutions to compile and collect revolutionary documents and trained new personnel to preserve and repair documents under specific guidance by the newly founded State Archives Bureau. Under this system, all civil archives fell into a single and centrally directed archives system. This system was heavily influenced by Soviet archival practices, wherein the key directive of all archival work was to facilitate the work of the one-party state. Unlike the various imperial archives, this meant at least on principle a certain level of professionalization: robust cataloguing systems, dedicated staff, and a more comprehensive collection. At the same time, archives were meant to serve as essentially a reference database for the state, with archives bureaus at every level established under the purview of local governments to manage the archives for that express purpose. Public access to such documentation had little to no significance in the state's approach to archive building (Ye and Esherick 1996, 15–18).

For a brief period after the 1980s, informational culture became somewhat liberalized. The reforms that swept over China after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the rise of Deng Xiaoping as paramount leader in 1978 drastically shifted many aspects of China's political, societal, and economic structures. Archives and the policies and politics surrounding archives were no exception. Prior to the 1980s, the point of the archives was expressly political, serving to help state officials understand their personnel, document their victories, and expose the mistakes of rivals and so-called “enemies” of the state. During the reform era, even as the archives remained of paramount importance to the state, the reason for that importance shifted. The state sought different approaches to the questions of economic and scientific “progress,” having been unsatisfied with the tumultuous, violent, and often frenetic approach to policy that had characterized so much of the early years of the PRC. Accordingly, in this era archives were meant to play a prime role in helping to cultivate new scientific, cultural, and intellectual trends. This necessitated a certain degree of openness to the public as the Archives Law of the PRC, passed in 1987, outlines in Article 19:

Archives kept by State archives repositories shall in general be open to the public upon the expiration of 30 years from the date

of their formation. Archives in economic, scientific, technological and cultural fields may be open to the public in less than 30 years; archives involving the security or vital interests of the State and other archives which remain unsuitable for accessibility to the public upon the expiration of 30 years may be open to the public after more than 30 years (Kraus 2016, 3).

Despite a new commitment to allow records to be used by members of the public, few provisions were made for the use of archival documents by foreigners except to note that such use required agreement from the authorities. Moreover, the Archives Law made clear that the state still had ultimate jurisdiction as to what was and was not acceptable for viewing (Ye and Esherick 1996, 19). Still, despite the very clear limits of this liberalization, the opening of the country for both domestic and foreign researchers led to a proliferation of works on topics that had previously been almost impossible to study without archival access. While Chinese studies in the United States had developed steadily throughout the Cold War, the opening of China to a new generation of younger scholars allowed for richer and more detailed works. Although the archives were only one part of that, with other scholars also relying on oral history, unofficial documentation, and the availability of new published sources, there is no doubt that Chinese history as a discipline benefited from the new availability of archival sources.

Shifting Climate

The opening up of various records from the 1950s and 1960s allowed historians and scholars to delve into topics that had previously been difficult to research, generating new social and political histories of Chinese revolutionary society. Moreover, whereas previous generations of scholars had largely used sources and fieldwork in Taiwan to study so-called “traditional” or imperial Chinese society, access to collections and subjects on the mainland fundamentally altered the practice of fields beyond history, including Chinese sociology, archaeology, anthropology, and political science among others. Major works produced from research between 1980 and 2012 thus greatly contributed to our understanding of early modern, modern, and contemporary Chinese society thanks to a huge variety of newly accessible sources. The growth of academic freedom in universities in Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, and other major metropolitan centers resulted in an unprecedented boom in Chinese scholarship; it even led to the establishment of nongovernmental repositories of sources and documents, including various published anthologies of documents.

Undergirding this relative liberalization, however, was the relatively ambiguous wording of the Archives Law and the prerogatives of local bureaucrats and archival staff. Even during this period, scholars noted that not every county or provincial-level archive was happy to let researchers access their materials, and indeed many researchers faced severe bureaucratic hurdles. In contrast, the Shanghai Municipal Archives became celebrated among foreign scholars for its ease of access, with many simply needing to provide a passport and a brief statement of intent to begin researching. That research conditions looked very different depending on the place in question, however, suggests that archival regulations were never quite systematized and were contingent on political headwinds (Rodriguez 2021, 10–11).

This brief period of openness was short-lived. After Xi Jinping became General Secretary of the CCP in 2012, the archival climate of the country began a reversal—one that continues today. The Archives Law’s emphasis on making archival access conditional on the security interests of the PRC broadly defined was tested in several high-profile cases. Frank Dikötter’s *Mao’s Great Famine*, published in 2011, was the product of intensive archival research in which the author systematically analyzed the human costs borne by the Great Leap Forward and its accompanied crop failures and famine. The book became a massive success in both academic and public circles, but controversies over Dikötter’s reading of archival

materials contributed to more scrutiny over what records could be accessed by scholars for the sake of “national security.” National security became the dominating ideology by which contemporary China reversed its information culture to one more akin to its pre-reform years (Kraus 2016, 15–18).

The celebrated openness of the Foreign Ministry Archive, one of the few national archives accessible to domestic and foreign scholars alike, soon fell prey to this shifting climate. In December 2012, a Japanese journalist allegedly used the Foreign Ministry Archives to find evidence that the PRC had, in 1950, referred to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands by their Japanese name in a document that the government had prepared for a potential peace treaty with Japan. This document was leaked to the Japanese press, giving support to the Japanese government’s argument in the territorial dispute over the islands that the PRC had only begun to dispute their status in the late 1970s after crucial energy resources were located off the coast of the islands (Kraus 2016, 21).

Following this episode, the Foreign Ministry Archive completely restricted scholarly access—both foreign and domestic—almost overnight, citing national security concerns and the question of China’s international stature. By 2013, access to the once expansive holdings of the archive had dramatically been reduced. On the internal database used to search for documents within the archive, 90% of previous results had been redacted. When questioned by researchers at the time, the archival staff declared that this was a technical error that they were working hard to resolve. By the next year, however, the archive was entirely closed and has only reopened intermittently since, and even then, only to government-sanctioned researchers. Access has not been restored to any of the files that were made unavailable following 2013.

The Foreign Ministry Archives was not alone in this transformation from being a powerful resource for research to vaguely useful at best. The excuse that archives were shut down to fix “technical” errors has since been used at most major provincial and city archives, including the Beijing Municipal Archives and the Sichuan Provincial Archives. The general pattern has been the same: the archives are closed for a set period ostensibly for “maintenance” or because of certain “glitches,” only for their actual holdings to have been shifted and even altered in the intervening period. In other cases, as with the Sichuan Provincial Archives, all post-1949 records have been entirely removed from view, thus potentially crippling a new generation of scholars who had been building on previous work to improve our understanding of Chinese revolutionary society.

Xi Jinping's administration has been markedly more conservative in its attitude toward humanities and social sciences research, with one scholar noting that the prevailing stance of the state toward these fields is to have them align with national interest. In other words, the mandate for archives has been reversed from a somewhat uneasy, experimental acceptance of research transparency to an earlier, more defensive approach to historical documentation: "Defend the archives for the Party; defend history for the nation" [为党守档, 为国守史]. As the CCP has grown more suspicious of historical scholarship, it has likewise become significantly more concerned with defending its own record. As a result, archival access has suffered and has continued to trend downward. These problems have only become worse in recent years. COVID-19 only intensified restricted accessibility, and it is not clear that the post-COVID-19 era will mark any significant improvements in this regard (Kraus 2016, 21).

Access and Structure

In the early 2000s, the most open archives in the PRC would usually allow foreign researchers to register through a relatively painless series of procedures, namely showing their passport and filling out an application form. At various other archives, it was necessary for researchers to show an introduction letter, either from one's home university in their country of origin, or from a local work unit (*danwei*) in China itself. The *danwei* is the principal economic and bureaucratic bloc in the PRC, simply describing one's workplace or governmental bureau, and in this case most scholars would get a letter from a university within China. As time went on and procedures tightened in the face of the political shifts described above, the procedures for accessing archives became more stringent and regulated, presumably from a desire to standardize practices across the country (Kraus 2016, 13).

By the early 2010s, it was necessary for researchers to not just show a valid passport, but to also have an introduction letter from a local work unit, usually a university within the country. These letters did not have to be particularly detailed; they just needed to describe one's work and essentially vouch for their character. Mostly these letters were treated as formalities except for at the strictest archives, where descriptions of archival research and scholarly interests would limit what archivists would be willing to provide to scholars in the first place. Procuring such a letter was difficult for some scholars, particularly those who had not yet formed any connections or networks in the mainland. But in time, this requirement became well understood by institutions in the PRC, and even relatively obscure research institutions were able to produce introduction letters that were accepted by the largest and most prominent archives in the country.

Even before certain limitations were put in place in 2013, however, some archives became notorious for demanding that a letter from a truly *local danwei* be provided. In other words, having a letter from an institution in Shanghai was no longer a guarantee of getting into archives in Wuhan. Moreover, other largely municipal archives required that foreign researchers also apply for access to fonds, which could be accepted or rejected on the archival staff's discretion. While in practice many of these procedures were formalities, they still stifled or slowed down researchers' progress in archival settings. Prior to COVID-19, as the availability of crucial files began to dwindle and surveilling of materials became significantly stricter, the requirements of verifiable letters of introduction,

registration, and passport became almost universal for foreign scholars at most major archives (Cunningham 2014).

Getting into the archives does not necessarily mean that using them becomes any easier. As Charles Kraus has documented through his extensive use of nearly two dozen Chinese archives, conditions in archives outside the major cities vary considerably. The primary purpose of these archives from the perspective of most citizens has been to collect personal histories and property rights and deeds. As such, many archives in smaller cities or localities do not necessarily have many facilities or amenities that we would associate with a research environment, such as dedicated reading rooms, numerous desks, or workspaces. Indeed, as the authors can attest, the environment of the archive can also be less than ideal for work because of non-researchers coming to argue with archival staff about their rights to old land and property.

Moreover, unlike conducting research in various archival settings throughout the world, from Western Europe to Japan, varying restrictions on work habits in Chinese archives make conducting research relatively more onerous. There are usually strict daily limits on how many files one can retrieve—at least, at archives where the holdings have not yet been totally digitized. Along those same lines, reproduction of documents has become increasingly difficult. At archives where files have not been digitized, many facilities no longer allow paper records to be photocopied. At digitized archives, many requests to have copies printed are refused out of deference to security concerns. Particularly with foreign scholars, there are fears that material could be taken and used abroad for nefarious purposes. Along those same lines, photographs are strictly forbidden. This has meant that in almost all Chinese archives, transcription remains the sole reliable method of retrieving records, which adds considerably to the amount of time that scholars must spend. Coupled with the bureaucratic hurdles and general difficulties with accessing archives in the first place, committing to a research agenda in the PRC necessitates considerable investment in both time and resources (Chen and Su 2017).

As with most governmental archives across the world, Chinese archives at every level are organized by province and department. In the Chinese context, this refers to the *danwei* associated with a certain activity. Each work unit has an associated record group number, with those holdings further divided by catalog numbers that sometimes, though not always, are associated with the year in which the files were created. Finally, within each catalog, folders are organized by their own associated number and a description of the various documents within each folder. These subdivisions mean that it is crucial for researchers to be aware of the

names of the *danwei* most relevant to their research ahead of time. This can be relatively straightforward at larger archives with digitized catalogs and robust keyword searches. At smaller archives, however, the division of topics along the lines of work units as opposed to thematic groupings can pose a barrier to researchers looking at a relatively broad phenomenon that may have involved a variety of *danwei* to varying extents.

Chinese archives do boast several unique features that offer certain advantages over institutions in other countries. For those studying Republican history, the ability to access a huge swath of both governmental and nongovernmental documents at the Second Historical Archive (see Appendix 2) is a great boon. For those studying the PRC, there is no national archive equivalent to either the First or Second Historical Archives; however, by visiting a major urban archive such as the Beijing Municipal or Shanghai Municipal Archives, scholars are able to glean significant amounts of information about aspects of everyday life that governmental records in other countries would simply not be able to offer. This is possible because most prominent features of urban life were dictated by various *danwei*, many of whose documents were collected and curated by state institutions.

On paper, another major advantage that Chinese archives have over institutions in other countries has been their commitment to digitization. As Chinese scholars have argued, these digitization efforts are key to the long-term preservation of archival materials; are in line with practices in the rest of the world; and highlight that despite deteriorating openness, Chinese archives are not totally hostile research environments. Indeed, coupled with the availability of digitized archives from abroad and the websites of certain archives, digitization has the potential to substantially decrease the difficulty that scholars currently face in accessing and using archival documents. For those scholars seeking to study the Republican or even late Qing periods, a wealth of documents are available on archival websites, with some, such as the Tianjin Municipal Archive, offering unregistered visitors free access to its records.

But while digitization has improved accessibility in a few areas, in practice it has also helped the Chinese state effectively curate information and sanitize archives. Unlike paper cataloging, wherein archives list closed fonds as restricted or off limits, digitization has the added benefit from the state's perspective of erasing any proof that restricted documents exist in the first place. With tightly controlled databases and internal search engines, if a scholar were not aware that the last decade has seen the repositories of Chinese archives shrink significantly, they would not even know that the research environment has shifted. Even as the Foreign

Ministry Archives continues to be open to scholars, only by comparing search results conducted by scholars nearly ten years ago with those of recent years can one tell that the archive's material has been thoroughly redacted and neutered (Chen and Su 2017). These authors' experiences with research in Chinese archives have similarly confirmed that digitization has made it easier for archival authorities to restrict access to files that were once available. For instance, files available at the Beijing Municipal Archives in 2018 were not available in 2023 despite the entire collection purportedly being digitally accessible.

There is no single script as to how a scholar should go about conducting research at a Chinese archive, though this publication offers readers a guide in Appendix 2. Methodologically, there is no systematic framework akin to American libraries or government archives. For some holdings, online catalogs are available, though they are usually poorly organized and not comprehensive. At other sites, paper or electronic catalogs are only available on-site; sometimes these can be copied or photographed, but in most cases the use of any phone or camera is entirely prohibited. At smaller county-level archives, some scholars have been asked to copy notes in longhand, though at most a laptop is permissible. At larger archives in big cities like Beijing or Shanghai, files can be ordered through the digitized system; at other institutions it is necessary to submit individual requisition slips. Most have restrictive policies regarding reproduction, as will be explored further in the next section, and ordering substantial numbers of copies will likely prove costly.

Problems with Access

As even a brief description of the archival system in today's PRC would suggest, there are several barriers for researchers hoping to access archival documents. Based on a survey that we conducted among 16 scholars of China in both the US and in the PRC, from graduate students to senior professors, there is a consensus that research conditions in the PRC have worsened over the last few years. This has most affected those with research topics on post-1949 history, though we also received responses suggesting that work on earlier periods, particularly the Qing Dynasty, has also become more fraught. This has been due to a combination of institutional and political factors, some of which have been outlined above but warrant further discussion.

DIGITIZATION

Many of our respondents had positive experiences at Chinese archives in several ways. Digitization, while allowing for the state to curate and eliminate collections with astonishing ease, has “made searching for files much more efficient” compared to the early 2000s. As one respondent put it: “Having ready access to a search engine and files on a computer at the Shanghai Municipal Archives made research there significantly more productive than at any other archive.... You could just sit down, run a search, open a document, and take notes/transcribe it.” Respondents generally shared some hesitation at having digital searches completely replace the opportunity to look through stacks or paper documents; they noted that organically discovering documents or seeing the full physical context of a collection is often invaluable for conducting research. Likewise, while cautioning that archival staff could often be suspicious of their work, most respondents noted that after developing personal rapport with staff or by rewording their interests in a way that was less sensitive, personnel at archives were happy to offer some guidance on how to navigate the holdings.

Overall, however, all respondents concluded that their archival experiences in other countries were significantly easier, with many noting that the differences were like “night and day.”

SHIFTING ATTITUDES TOWARD FOREIGN RESEARCHERS

A significant barrier to entry for non-Chinese national scholars has been shifting attitudes toward foreign researchers in the PRC. There has been a growing reluctance on the part of Chinese scholars in the PRC to offer

letters of introduction to their foreign interlocutors, because of perceived repercussions they may face should said foreign researchers abuse their access to the archives. Moreover, expectations as to where one should get a letter have changed over the last decade. Whereas in previous years, an introduction letter from any major Chinese *danwei*, including prestigious universities in Beijing or Shanghai, could typically provide one with access to even remote archives, new guidelines in some localities have specified the need to get a letter from an official governmental authority or a local *danwei*. Such letters are rarely obtainable without close rapport with government officials and, indeed, in many cases our survey responses indicated that in practice, the need to get such a letter means that the archive is functionally not open. In late 2022, rumors began circulating that the government intends to mandate a QR code on each introduction letter to identify the holder correctly, which may further deter academics in the PRC from issuing letters to foreign colleagues. In the past, indiscretions at the archives by scholars have led to more scrutiny on the issuer of the letter, and in the current political climate, scholars at Chinese universities are being actively warned against collaborating with those from abroad. In other cases, respondents noted that in certain regions that have sensitive material, namely the northeast, archives have what is functionally a blanket ban on all foreign researchers from consulting any of their holdings, regardless of topic, time period, or researcher background.

On the other hand, smaller archives generally were more amenable to Chinese citizens, often requiring little more than a *shenfenzheng* [身份证] or ID card. In recent years, however, there have been clear limitations to this as letters are also being required for domestic Chinese scholars. Moreover, Chinese citizens affiliated with a foreign university are often met with restrictions on their access similar to those for foreign researchers, and a few respondents noted that certain topics and documents at various archives ranging from those at the local county level to larger municipal institutions were off-limits to them despite their *shenfenzheng*. Anecdotal evidence would likewise suggest that even among scholars working at domestic institutions, access to documents perceived as sensitive—namely those to do with the 1950s or 1960s—has been elusive at best. As another interlocutor working in the mainland told us, hundreds of files that he had seen at a major archive only months prior were suddenly reclassified and made unavailable. The logic behind these decisions is not at all transparent.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

The lack of transparency has universally baffled and frustrated all respondents to our survey. As one put it, “It was not uncommon for me to visit multiple archives in the same city or province and discover completely

different cultures on access. The inconsistency in rules governing access is both a source of frustration and opportunity for those conducting archival research in the PRC.” While most enjoyed a cordial or professional relationship with archivists, several respondents also noted that archival staff were often made uncomfortable by the presence of foreign scholars and were thus more combative, fearing repercussions of a possible breach. In some cases, in smaller archives, archivists themselves were not entirely clear on the procedures involved in granting access to foreign scholars and opted to forbid access entirely out of fear.

RESTRICTIVE ACCESS POLICIES

COVID-19 certainly disrupted normal research procedures. However, even prior to the pandemic, access had been growing significantly less reliable. The case of the Foreign Ministry Archive has already been mentioned, but other examples are no less stark and, if anything, are not as easy to explain. In 2017, for example, major archives throughout the country completely restricted all access to files from the post-1949 period. Others closed their doors entirely as part of new measures to digitize and, arguably, sanitize records before they were released to the public. Several of our respondents noted that by 2016, many of the archival holdings with which they were familiar were radically different compared to the early 2000s or 2010s: catalogs had been scrubbed, and there were more bureaucratic hoops to go through. These include new rules for reproduction. At many archives in the world, it is possible to order either photocopies or scanned copies of documents. While restrictions do exist in other countries (e.g., either monetary or proprietary, with some archives not allowing visitors to copy more than a certain percentage of any given file or collection), they are far less stringent than those in the PRC. Moreover, many archives are happy to let researchers take their own photographs, either for free or for a given rate per photo or file; this is not possible in any archives across the PRC unless one has direct, personal connections to the archivist or government officials.

In the PRC, rules surrounding reproduction have grown increasingly strict. As one survey response noted, at the famed First Historical Archives, which is the premier destination for historians of the Qing Dynasty, new rules since 2016 have heavily restricted the annual limit of photocopies that researchers can request—roughly 20 documents per year. Any subsequent files would have to be copied by hand. Consequently, collecting a significant amount of material now requires being based in Beijing for lengthy periods of time to transcribe documents one at a time. This is made worse by the fact that scholars can only see documents that have

been digitized, thus locking away most of the archive's holdings until digitization has been completed.

At other archives, such as the Beijing and Shanghai Municipal Archives, even as reproduction policies have grown stricter in terms of page count, the time it takes for the preparation of copies has also increased correspondingly. Moreover, it is not always clear that researchers will receive a file that they are expecting; some copy requests are denied because of the sensitivity of the document in question. The Shanghai Municipal Archives recently allowed researchers to apply to copy up to 100 pages a day. This is seemingly generous; however, many documents are deemed too sensitive for reproduction and as such, a large percentage of those pages would never arrive. Scholars can sometimes expect to wait several months to receive the files that authorities consider acceptable for reproduction. On the other hand, respondents also noted that at particularly small archives, despite any latent suspicion that the archival staff may have of their work, they were significantly laxer about reproduction rules; in at least one case, archival staff even let a researcher take as many photos as he liked. These were extraordinary instances, however, and it is not clear to what extent they may continue.

COVID-19

The greatest challenge to research in the PRC in recent years has, without a doubt, been the ongoing restrictions on entering and navigating the country in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the number of infections and prevalence of COVID-19 have varied considerably since the beginning of the pandemic in late 2019, Chinese restrictions on foreigners have remained strict. Some measures were taken in 2021 to ease these restrictions for students and academics. However, none of our respondents have been back to the PRC since COVID-19 because of visa restrictions, unavailability of flights, and mandatory quarantine requirements. Moreover, though they remain unverified, there were reports in 2021 that although the PRC had begun to open up domestically, *all* archives had maintained a blanket ban on any foreigner consulting their holdings. As we enter the summer of 2023 at the time of this writing, there are signs that this may be changing slowly. One colleague reported being allowed at one smaller archive in Hebei Province, though her American citizenship made accessing relevant files from the 1940s onward incredibly difficult. Changing rules and a lack of transparency remain, as ever, the biggest challenges faced by those seeking to use Chinese archives.

The PRC recently announced a stunning reversal of its so-called zero-COVID policy, including lifting quarantine requirements on foreign

travelers, easing requirements for acquiring an entry visa, and abolishing the cap on inbound flights. We are not yet sure what this will mean for the resumption of research activity or archival access. However, there is little reason to believe that the trends prior to COVID-19—restrictions on access and a desire to sanitize historical records and narratives—will be reversed. The senior scholars who participated in our survey reminisced of better times in the late 1990s and early 2000s and the ease with which they were able to collect documents and visit archives across the local, county, provincial, and national levels. This era is not likely to return, which leaves us with the question: How can scholars adapt to these new archival conditions?

Solutions and New Approaches

Despite pessimism about the direction of Chinese archives in general, our respondents were not entirely pessimistic about the fate of historical research on China. Scholars pointed to a variety of solutions that could continue to promote and grow the field even though they may not fully make up for a lack of direct archival access. As several respondents said in no uncertain terms: “archival research is not the only way to conduct research on China.” Indeed, it may soon even cease to be a recommended way of doing so.

Even as travel restrictions ease, it is likely that US-based scholars will still benefit from committing to new types of collaborations with scholars based in the PRC. This may be difficult to pursue at a time when the academic community in mainland China is facing new restrictions and pressures. But especially in the context of deteriorating bilateral relations and shared challenges faced by scholars in both countries, efforts to foster collaboration are more important than ever. Such collaboration could take a variety of forms. It could mean, for example, consulting with colleagues in Chinese universities to find published or rarer sources outside of archives; working together to translate new and exciting works from Mandarin to introduce them to new audiences; requesting letters of introduction or, in lieu of that, asking them to consult archival catalogs or materials in return for similar support for their work in the United States.

BUILD CONNECTIONS WITH EXISTING RESEARCH COLLECTIVES AND NETWORKS

Building connections with existing research collectives and networks within China could also help facilitate access to materials from online marketplaces, oral history collections, and private archival holdings. These remain relatively rare in China, but in recent years scholars in both countries have turned toward privately held materials to which they have gained access through personal networks. Broadening those networks and introducing a new generation of scholars to such materials could go a long way toward deepening the patterns of cooperation that have fueled so much historical research. At the same time, recent emphases on sanitizing the historical record may prove to be a major constraint in the willingness of colleagues in the PRC to collaborate. But the advantages to such collaboration could be significant. As one respondent put it: “The most powerful among us, the program directors and the full professors at the Ivies, need to find ways to make connections with their counterparts in China. Money and resources are needed to get more materials digitized. And these digital materials need to be shared in our academic community.”

EXTEND SUPPORT TO COLLEAGUES IN THE PRC

It must also be noted that so much of the work of US-based scholars prior to COVID-19 relied on the help of colleagues in Chinese universities—letters, networking, introductions to less widely read Chinese authors, or even just gentle nudges in the right direction—and that these intercessions have often gone unthanked by academics at American institutions. Any future mode of collaboration would have to extend support to colleagues in the PRC; institutional connections would go a long way toward making this possible. American institutions can play a particularly important role in adjusting to new realities of archival research in the PRC by formalizing ties with their counterparts in the PRC. As many respondents noted, the political climate in the United States has done little to foster this sort of collaboration, particularly in the aftermath of Fulbright ending its programs to the mainland. In the words of one respondent, “There thus needs to be continuing efforts to cultivate ties between universities and research institutions in the two countries, even and especially in the midst of political turbulence. The exchange of scholars and students, and lively communications and relationships between institutions in the two countries, is the best hope we have for a future road of lively and rich research work and collaboration.”

Universities can also play a role in continuing to host Chinese academics and inviting them to conferences and talks, thus offering more opportunities to share resources, approaches, and knowledge about new bureaucratic procedures. More funding can be offered to scholars from the PRC to support their research initiatives in the United States, or to encourage collaboration between graduate students in both countries.

DIGITIZE MATERIALS IN AMERICAN LIBRARIES AND UNIVERSITIES

There are other avenues to pursue such collaboration, however. Libraries and collections in the United States have made great efforts to purchase and procure documents from the PRC, including private ones. American libraries and universities can take a leading role in digitizing these materials and compiling databases that can be accessed by researchers here and abroad. Indeed, as junior faculty members mentioned, there is a stark disparity within American institutions regarding the resources available for subscribing to the most popular databases, newspapers, and other resources. To that end, senior faculty can play a large role in encouraging their institutions to widen access. Moreover, as one senior scholar noted, “Those of us who have collected archival materials in the past can donate them to libraries or archives outside the PRC in order to make them available to other researchers.” Over the last few decades, many scholars

have collected expansive numbers of documents and oral histories. Making these available to younger scholars will help keep the field of Chinese history afloat even if archival difficulties continue.

CONSULT COLLECTIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Indeed, with the availability of major resources in the United States and in repositories throughout the world, many respondents argued that it may be necessary for researchers to take a more capacious approach to “research on China.” The field of Chinese history, both in the PRC period and before it, would benefit from extensive collections in other countries. Our respondents mentioned Taiwan as a good alternative for some topics. Other countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, India, Australia, and Japan also have collections on various topics that could be of use to researchers. This poses a daunting challenge to many scholars, as many materials in these countries will not be available in either English or Chinese, or scholars may have difficulty communicating with archives staff. Regardless, it may be worth casting a wider net, and in Appendix 2 we provide more information on a few of the institutions outside the PRC that hold relevant documents.

CONSULT COLLECTIONS OUTSIDE FORMAL ARCHIVAL SETTINGS

Both authors of this report and many of our survey participants have conducted research outside of formal archival settings, namely through libraries, private collections, universities, and “garbology,” referring to the collection of historical documents and materials from online platforms. This has been a great boon to the field, and though regulations have tightened on several platforms and the sale of historical materials online, many respondents expect that such materials, coupled with published compendia of primary sources, will become increasingly important for the next generation of scholars. Libraries can likewise play an important role in procuring such materials or in providing grants and financial support to those seeking to take advantage of them.

ADAPT RESEARCH APPROACH TO PREVAILING CONDITIONS

A stark reality that confronts all historians of China in the wake of closures and difficulties as they return to the field is the need for researchers to adapt the sort of questions they ask according to these conditions. As one PhD candidate put it, the wider academic community must recognize “that the research landscape has changed, so accordingly adjust expectations on the nature of empirical evidence that can be brought to bear.” A junior scholar agreed, noting, “There should be an awareness and

acknowledgment that junior scholars should not be expected to include archival materials in their research.” A senior colleague agreed, arguing that one solution would be “greater institutional access to research databases, more research funding opportunities, and more tenure-track professorships.”

Most importantly of all, as one senior scholar noted, the field of Chinese history has seen similar restrictions in the past; previous generations working in the 1960s and 1970s also had to conduct research on China “from without” and still produced landmark works of scholarship. We will have to adapt the types of questions we ask and perhaps take a more expansive attitude toward historical periodization. Archival collections related to the Republican era remain broadly more open than their Mao-era equivalents, though there are growing signs of constraints on research on that period as well. On the other hand, many archives have begun rapidly declassifying materials from the 1970s onward, including the major municipal archives and even a few higher-level provincial archives such as the Zhejiang Provincial Archives. According to one interlocutor, new files are made accessible at the Beijing Municipal Archives—long a favorite among researchers for its relative openness—almost every other week, suggesting that there will be a wealth of material for a new generation of scholars to analyze. The reform and opening-up era from 1979 onward thus seem to be less historically problematic or controversial for authorities to discuss. Even as the research environment for scholars operating outside the mainland continues to deteriorate, it is plausible that accessing materials from this era will continue to be relatively easy.

It is thus likely that the contours of what we consider to be sensible research projects for historians of modern China in particular will have to change. These challenges are largely limited to historians of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although doing Qing history will face its own challenges in the light of ever-growing restrictions on work conducted at the First Historical Archives, the abundance of published records, smaller collections at other archives, and material from Taiwan will mean that historical research on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries will be somewhat easier. For those tackling the Republican and Mao eras, however, it will be necessary to reassess the temporal divisions that the discipline has gradually erected between the Republican, Mao, and Reform years. Even as the field of PRC history—one to which this report’s authors broadly belong—has grown dramatically over the last two decades, it is likely that our approach to it will have to completely change in the light of ongoing restrictions.

However, even as the authors of this report and the various scholars

that we interviewed would stress the need to embrace a more capacious approach to researching modern Chinese history, either through using archives and materials outside the country or by widening our temporal scope, this does not mean jettisoning research within the PRC itself. Scholarly exchange and cooperation across borders, even at a time of deteriorating relations between the PRC and the United States in particular, are crucial not only for our work but for supporting our colleagues in mainland China. As one of our respondents put it, we “should continue to push to have access to China and its archives and to find ways to work in mainland China and collaborate with our colleagues there. The results are hard won, but worth the effort.”

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire for The Chinese Archive: A Pocket Manual

Please answer the questions below. There is no expected length. Your personal details are for internal use only.

1. Email
2. Name
3. Position
4. Discipline
5. Do you wish to remain anonymous in our publication?
____ Yes
____ No
6. How many archives in China have you consulted, at which level (i.e., county, city, provincial, etc.) and when?
7. Are you a citizen of the People's Republic of China?
____ Yes
____ No
8. Did your citizenship status affect your access to different archives, or your access to collections within said archives? If so, how?
9. How have you described your work to personnel at Chinese archives? Has your access ever been restricted based on the topic of research, and if so in what way? What were your interactions with the archivists and staff like?
10. What procedures were required to access collections, order photocopies, and did the archivists provide you with any help in finding documents of relevance?
11. How did you determine whether or not the archive in question would be relevant to your research? Was information about the archive freely available in the form of a published catalog or website?
12. Have you conducted archival research outside of mainland China? If so, how did your experiences compare?
13. How would you assess the push for digitizing sources at archives in China? Has it made conducting research easier or more difficult?

14. When was the last time you visited a Chinese archive? How did conditions compare to your first time?
15. What do you think are the biggest challenges facing archival work in China today?
16. Following the pandemic, many archives either accelerated previous trends of limiting access to certain files, particularly in the 1950s and 60s, or closed their doors to foreign scholars entirely. How has this impacted your work?
17. What avenues do you think scholars pursuing research on the PRC should turn to at this time? Is there any way to make up for a lack of archival access?
18. What steps can tenured and senior faculty in the United States take to assist junior scholars in their research on China in light of these changes?
19. Where do you see the future of scholarship in China heading, and how do you think archivists and universities in the United States can adapt to such changes in informational culture?

APPENDIX 2

Archives for Research on China: A Practical Guide

Although we have painted a picture of the difficulty in doing research on China, scholars have found a variety of solutions and workarounds to be helpful, most notably using resources outside the PRC. Below is a list of archives and databases that scholars have found useful in their research, both inside and outside the PRC. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it serves as a good starting point for early-career scholars interested in utilizing broad databases with a good track record for robust research materials.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC)

We have discussed the increasing difficulties scholars face when attempting to conduct research in the PRC. Nevertheless, it is possible to navigate the random black boxes that are the Chinese archives and libraries, provided one is patient, determined, and able to surrender to the possibility of failure. Below is advice from researchers affiliated with foreign universities who visited a variety of archives between 2018 and 2022. The researchers have kindly provided us with in-depth descriptions of their experiences. All researchers have requested complete anonymity.

General Advice for Archives in the PRC:

1. *Plan ahead:* Before your visit, research the archives' collections and identify the materials that you need to review. Develop a research plan and prioritize the materials that you need to review. Ensure that your introduction letter provides a very concise but general summary of your research interests to ensure that you can get access to all relevant documents.
2. *Bring your own stationery.* Some archives may not allow you to bring in a laptop, whereas others may just ask you to store your phone or bag in a locker.
3. *Be prepared to spend lengthy amounts of time:* Heavy bureaucratic procedures mean that it may take several days to locate and review the necessary documents. Researchers should be prepared to spend sufficient time at the archives to ensure a thorough review of materials. As a rule of thumb, roughly double the amount of time you would expect to spend in a US archive.

4. *Take detailed notes:* Taking detailed notes is crucial to keep track of the materials reviewed and to ensure that the information is accurately recorded. Often you may be able to review a particular document on a particular day, only to discover that the document is not available the next time you request it. Request history has no bearing on whether a given document is available for access on any given day. Access depends entirely on the archivist. You will want to also make sure you contextualize the archival documents you find, noting, for example, what danwei they have been sourced from and how they have been organized.
5. *Be patient:* The archives' bureaucratic procedures can be time-consuming and frustrating. It is essential that you remain patient and follow the rules and regulations to ensure a successful research visit.

Generally, upon arrival at an archive in the PRC, researchers must show their identification and appointment confirmation. The archives' staff will then verify the researcher's identity and provide them with a reader's pass. The reader's pass is valid for the duration of the researcher's visit, though there are some exceptions such as when you would like to access an entirely different set of files at a given institution. The process usually involves the following steps:

1. You must first show your letter of introduction (介绍信) from a Chinese institution with a red stamp. An archivist will send you to one of the computers to fill out the basic personal information (e.g., name, affiliation, passport number) you need to submit after which you can go back to the counter.
2. The archivist will then ask you to specify your research topic. Sometimes, this may include identifying the fond numbers (总号) of the archives you wish to research, or even more specific document numbers (档号). It's worth preparing ahead using the official guide (指南) on the archive's websites. Some, including the most popular municipal archives, will have fairly extensive catalogs, though be warned that these catalogs are not always up-to-date or reflective of what you may actually have access to at the archives. Some archives will also keep printed booklets or guides that list available material for public access.
3. With your subject established, the archivist will lead you to your seat. At an archive with digitized holdings, you may begin searching; at archives with paper catalogs, you may have to wait for the archivist to bring files or catalogs that they believe are relevant to your research. Some archives allow you to requisition

files digitally, whereas others require you to fill slips. In most cases, documents will arrive rather promptly, but some archives will either not allow requisitions to be made during certain hours (usually between 11:00 and 14:00), or they will close the reading room altogether at that time. Be prepared to arrive promptly to make the most of your time.

Specific Archives

Second Historical Archives, Nanjing (<http://www.shac.net.cn/>)

The Second Historical Archives in Nanjing, China, is an essential resource for researchers studying the history of the Republic of China. The archives contain a wealth of materials, including government documents, personal papers, photographs, and other historical records.

To access the Second Historical Archives, researchers must make an appointment in advance. Researchers can book an appointment by phone or email, and they must provide identification in the form of a passport or ID card. Researchers must also submit a research plan to the archives in advance of their appointment. The research plan should include information on the materials to be reviewed and the expected date of the visit. Upon arrival at the archives, researchers must show their identification and appointment confirmation.

Archivists at the Second Historical Archives are rather strict about how you access your requested records. If you have exhausted your requested documents and want to add more fonds to your list, that is entirely dependent on the archivist. Officially, researchers can only make additions if they restart the whole registration process. Whether that entails the need for a new letter of introduction is unclear at this point—some researchers were told they needed a new letter; others were able to add fonds with ease. It is essential to maintain a good rapport with the incumbent archivist. Don't push or barter, keep showing up, and hope that eventually an archivist will privilege your access. Moreover, only certain materials are allowed to be copied or recorded (all by hand). The archivist will provide a slip to determine what is allowed or forbidden. There is no logic to what is allowed; it depends entirely on the archivist. You are allowed to print up to 50 pages a year.

As of 2022, due to COVID-19, an appointment was needed to enter the archives. You can make an appointment on their official website (their website blocks foreign IP addresses so you must use a VPN). You need to make an appointment **15 days** in advance, but you can make successive appointments.

First Historical Archives (<https://www.fhac.com.cn/index.html>)

Established in 1925, the First Historical Archives has long been the go-to destination for scholars seeking to research Qing history. There are smaller collections of Qing history at some of the prominent municipal archives as well as notable collections at county-level archives such as Baxian in Sichuan. Since 2008, these archives have ceased distributing original documents; rather, all work is now done from digitized versions. Their recently renovated website offers a robust and up-to-date catalog of their holdings, and the archival staff is quite friendly and willing to help researchers with their topics.

Unfortunately, while the First Historical Archives offers an impressive collection, all researchers are limited to photocopying 20 documents per research trip, with each “research trip” referring to one trip per calendar year. Laptops are not allowed; notes thus must be taken by hand or via computers on site, where at the end of the day you may request that the archival staff transfer your typed notes to you via USB after they have inspected them. The reading room is open from 8:30 to 16:30 on weekdays, though the latest entry is at 16:00.

As of 2023, it is necessary to register on the website and book an appointment at the archive at least 7 to 10 days in advance, though batch-bookings are also possible. To register, you are required to have a Chinese SIM card; it is also possible to register via the archives’ official WeChat account (皇史宬), though we could not confirm whether you can do so from outside of the PRC. To access the archival website, as with most governmental websites, you must use a VPN that allows you to connect as though you are currently on the mainland.

Jilin Provincial Archives (<http://www.jlsda.cn/>)

The Jilin Provincial Archives (JPA), located in Changchun’s business district, offers a clean, well-lit, and comfortable environment for conducting research. The collections span from Qianlong 19 (1754) to the present, covering a wide range of topics related to political and economic history, including forest management, industry promotion, education, and more. The archive strictly limits access to Manchukuo collections for foreign scholars. Foreign and Chinese researchers can access the Qing (1754–1911) and Republican (1912–1931) collections. Selected materials from the Manchukuo period (1932–1945) are accessible by Chinese researchers, while Liberation-era materials (1949–1978) are currently closed to all researchers. Note that the JPA does not allow photocopying of any archival materials.

Before your visit, call the JPA to confirm the availability of the collections you're interested in. Fax your application materials, including an application letter, a copy of your passport and visa, and a letter of introduction to the archive at least two weeks before your visit. The JPA's reading room is open from 8:40 to 11:20 and from 13:30 to 16:20 in summer, and from 13:00 to 15:50 in winter. Aim to arrive close to the opening time on your first day to complete administrative procedures.

Upon arrival, you'll need to register at the security desk and in the reading room (Room 506). Fill out the required forms and provide your identification materials. Once you have permission to access documents, you can search through the digital catalog and request specific folders. Allow at least half an hour for archivists to retrieve and examine the folders you request.

Beijing Municipal Archives (<https://www.bjma.gov.cn/>)

Municipal archives tend to be easier to access than provincial ones. However, they are limited in their holdings to the specific city, although sometimes they may have documents related to other parts of China. To access the archives, researchers must submit a research application and obtain a reader's card. Researchers can use the archives immediately upon registration. The archives are open 9:15 to 17:15 Monday through Friday. As of early 2023, an appointment is required to use the archives, but bulk appointments up to a week can be made.

Researchers can peruse the online catalog to prepare for their visit. The catalog is divided into several sections with materials on the Republican era, post-1949, Beijing model-workers, and more. Once researchers have identified a document of interest, they need to write down the 11-digit *danghao* and take it to the desk in the entrance hall. You can also specify what form of duplication you want: photocopy, scan, and so on. The final decision on whether something can be copied rests with the archivists. You can choose either of two ways to print your materials. You can apply to copy 20 pages a day or 100 pages a day. If you apply for the 20-page option, you can get your documents on the following day. If you choose to print 100 pages, it will take more than a month to process the application.

Shanghai Municipal Archives (<https://www.archives.sh.cn/inc/kgxx/>)

Located in the heart of the Bund, the Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA) is renowned for the depths of its records, ranging from the archives of all previous foreign settlements, to the Republican-era municipal government and the major *danwei* of the early PRC era—including United

Front organizations such as the All-China Women's Federation. The SMA also has a small but growing collection of archival documents from private organizations and companies—from both the Republican era and post-1979. While, as with all major archives, the institution's holdings have been trimmed since the early 2010s, the SMA still has the distinction of being one of the few archives to have collated documents and records from United Front organizations. Thus, the SMA gives scholars the chance to better understand the granularities of everyday politics in the 1950s and 1960s, and when taken together with substantial holdings from the Republican era, the SMA remains one of the most important archives for historians of modern China.

During COVID-19, foreign scholars were not allowed to use these facilities, as was the case across many of the archives in the country. Reports would indicate that this has recently changed and that as of July 2023, scholars of all nationalities are once again allowed entry. As with other municipal archives, however, it is now necessary to reserve a slot at the SMA at least a week in advance, either through its website or official WeChat account. SMA releases all time slots for the following week each Friday morning (around 9:30), but visitors can only make an appointment for one day; you can only make your next appointment after you have checked in at the archives counter.

Online registration is also possible, though you are advised to bring all necessary documentation when you visit to request permission to consult the holdings. It may be necessary to renew your registration at least once a month (with a refreshed letter of introduction) though it is unclear whether this is mandatory across the board.

Scholars can order up to 50 pages of photocopies per day, which will usually be processed within a week or so. As with the BMA, should any of the content be considered controversial or sensitive, the archivists will not approve of the reproduction, though you will only learn this after the fact. According to our interlocutors, a new round of censorship has been taking place, which has led to the reclassification of some Republican-era documents involving personal information, as well as Party-related documents from the Mao period.

Tianjin Municipal Archives (<https://www.tjdag.gov.cn>)

Like the SMA, the Tianjin Municipal Archives also offers a robust catalog of late Qing and Republican-era documents, especially relevant for those seeking to learn more about the everyday dynamics between foreigners and Chinese citizens throughout the early twentieth century. In recent years, their holdings of PRC-era documents have been slowly declassified,

especially those related to trade and industry. While not as extensive as the collections in Shanghai or Beijing, their holdings include documents from the 1970s and 1980s. The online catalog is not as up to date as the those of the larger archives, however, which means that going to the archive to double-check what is and is not available is a must.

Unlike other municipal archives, the intranet-accessible catalog can be photographed, though of course, the documents themselves cannot be. Documents may be photocopied, with a limit of 50 pages per day, and documents can be ordered only between 8:30 and 11:30, and then again between 13:30 and 16:30. However, these documents arrive remarkably quickly, even compared to the BMA and SMA. As of this writing, it does not appear that any appointments are necessary.

The National Library of China (<http://www.nlc.cn/web/index.shtml>)

Conveniently located off of Line 4 on the Beijing metro, the National Library of China (NLC) boasts the country's largest holdings of rare books and periodicals. This includes a robust collection of ancient books, though usually in a reproduced form, from as early as the Song dynasty, as well as collections in ethnic minority languages. The NLC also boasts an impressive catalog of gazetteers, newspapers, periodicals, vernacular works, scholarly studies, and fiction from the seventeenth century onward, making it an indispensable resource for researchers of early modern and modern China.

Despite its robust collections, the NLC unfortunately is mired in bureaucracy that can often make for a frustrating user experience. Registration is simple and quick, requiring an ID and an application form that can be found upon entry. However, the NLC's collections are spread out throughout the facility over myriad reading rooms, all with their own requisition forms and timings. Accessing microfilms, in particular, is rather difficult and time consuming, with few decent options for reproduction. Survey participants noted that reproduction has been possible in the past, though perhaps COVID-19 changed this. The NLC is open every day except for Monday, though certain reading rooms are also closed on Sundays, from 9:00 to 17:00.

Guangdong Provincial Archives (<https://www.da.gd.gov.cn/>)

Once famed for its accessibility for scholars of all eras, the Guangdong Provincial Archives (GPA), like many provincial archives throughout the country, has become significantly more restrictive. As of early 2023, scholars are limited to photocopying no more than 100 pages a month, and it appears that the volume of material currently available for consultation

compared to several years ago has shrunk drastically. According to these authors' interlocutors, files that are supposedly accessible according to the catalog were not permitted to be shown.

Despite these limitations, the GPA remains one of the more accessible provincial-level archives in the PRC at the time of this writing. The GPA's content will be of great interest to those seeking to learn more about (1) the experiences of Chinese travelers and diasporic populations from the Qing dynasty onward; (2) the ways in which disparate provincial governments and authorities responded to national campaigns and central directives in the Republican and PRC eras; (3) the trajectory and origins of the reform and opening-up period; and (4) more generally, the connections between Chinese political and economic trends and international relations, as highlighted by the GPA's robust collection on the famed Canton World Fairs.

The GPA is open from Mondays to Fridays between 9:00 and 11:30, and from 14:00 to 17:00, though in most cases you can stay in the reading room during the afternoon break. As of early 2023, appointments are mandatory and must be made over the phone at least one day prior to entry.

Guangdong Provincial Library (<http://www.gzlib.org.cn/>)

In comparison to the relative strictness of the GPA, the Guangdong Provincial Library is a treasure trove. With publications dating to the late nineteenth century onward, including obscure political pamphlets, local gazetteers, and some governmental reports and studies, along with a robust online catalog and search engine, the GPL would be of great interest to most historians of modern China, particularly those studying the twentieth century. In comparison to other libraries in the country, moreover, the GPL allows scholars to freely take photos of books that they order, though these all come from closed stacks. Thus, even though its holdings are not as comprehensive as the National Library of China in Beijing, it is significantly easier to work here. No reservations or invitation letters are required: simply register for a reader's card on-site and begin your work. The library is open from 9:00 to 21:00 on weekdays and from 9:00 to 16:00 on Saturday, though some rooms are only open until 17:30.

The preceding guides are hardly exhaustive. There are many archives in places such as Sichuan, Zhejiang, Hubei, Jiangsu, and other regions that have also been historically open to foreign scholars, though much of this may have changed in the last few years. For a good sense of the unpredictability of county, provincial, regional, and municipal archives in other parts of China (particularly those interested in researching

the borderlands), see “Inner Mongolia Regional Archives, Hohhot,” written by Sakura Christmas before the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ For a more comprehensive guide to the various archives in the PRC, see Resources for Historical Research on the People’s Republic of China.² Although this guide may be somewhat outdated, it provides useful information.

TAIWAN

For research on Republican and dynastic China, archives in Taiwan are easily accessible, friendly, and welcoming to foreigners. Many of them also hold a substantial range of documents that are well preserved. In 2021, the Long US-China Institute at UC Irvine and Yale University’s Council on East Asian Studies presented the second annual webinar series, “Doing Chinese History (in a New Era).”³ Designed for—but not exclusive to—graduate students and junior scholars in Chinese history and Chinese studies, these webinars aim to address persistent challenges in research and professional development. This webinar provides an in-depth guide to using digital and in-person Taiwanese archives for research on dynastic, Republican Chinese, and contemporary Taiwanese topics. We recommend watching this video to ascertain the depth of Taiwanese collections and how to access them, with relevant archives being the National Palace Museum (for Ming and Qing history), Academia Sinica (for Republican history), Academia Historica (home to various foreign-policy related documents from the Republican era), and the National Archives Administration (for Republican and Taiwanese history).

JAPAN

A variety of local archives and collections are located in Japanese cities such as Osaka and Nagasaki; these archives are useful for scholars of China researching a wide variety of topics, including those seeking to learn more about Qing-era trading networks or piracy or the experiences of Chinese diasporic populations in Japan and elsewhere over the last few hundred years. Many of said collections would require some level of Japanese, if not to read sources—though indeed many of the relevant sources would be in either modern Japanese or its classical variant (kanbun)—then to at least communicate with archival staff. For this guide, we will briefly outline some of the major collections that are in the Tokyo area instead of presenting a more exhaustive list.

1 <http://dissertationreviews.org/inner-mongolia-regional-archives-hohhot-china/>

2 <https://prchistoryresources.org/doku.php?id=archives>

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpkQ6wLorYY>

Japan Center for Asian Historical Records (JACAR) (<https://www.jacar.go.jp/english/>)

An online database that is largely available in English, JACAR collates documents from the National Archives of Japan, various Ministry archives, and private collections. Most of this material is accessible online, though some links are incomplete; in any case, this gives users a good sense of what is out there.

Tōyō Bunko (<http://www.toyo-bunko.or.jp/toyobunko-e/index.php>)

Also known as the “Oriental Library,” this is Japan’s largest Asian studies library, functioning as a research institute that has put out an impressive number of primary source collections and secondary research. It is most notable for its collection of rare books, many of which have also been digitized. Also noteworthy is its archival holdings, namely collections amassed by travelers and scholars, including a variety of famous Japanese sinologists. These holdings would be of most interest to scholars of the Ming and Qing periods, though those seeking to learn more about the development of Sinology throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may also benefit. Tōyō Bunko’s reading room can be accessed free of charge, and all that is necessary to gain entrance is an ID.

Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.mofa.go.jp/about/hq/record/index.html>)

These archives hold the extent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ records from the mid-nineteenth century onward, though most of the documents come from the twentieth century. These include many relevant records for those seeking to understand Japanese perceptions of China, the development of Chinese nationalism, records relevant to China’s War of Resistance against Imperial Japan as well as an impressive collection of diplomatic observations and policy documents regarding contact with the PRC from the 1950s to the 1970s. These include a variety of intelligence and economic records as well. As of this writing, the reading room is only accessible via reservations whereupon researchers can order documents. Membership is free, and researchers are allowed to take as many pictures as they like, though some documents require extra time to be checked and declassified.

Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia (<https://www.ioc.u-tokyo.ac.jp/eng/>)

Affiliated with the prestigious University of Tokyo, the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia boasts an impressive library that features donations from many of the university’s famed scholars of China, including

Maeno Naoaki, Seiji Imabori, and Motoichi Oki. In addition to these scholars' personal collections and reflections on their work or time spent in China, the Institute is also home to an impressive array of rare Chinese periodicals and manuscripts. Reservations have to be made in advance if you are not affiliated with the university, but the Institute is also very eager to establish affiliations with foreign scholars, which makes accessing its collections significantly easier.

HONG KONG

Hong Kong's universities in particular have historically offered access to a variety of sources on Chinese history that were sensitive or otherwise unavailable on the mainland. In recent years, while the general climate has suffered from crackdowns on academic freedom, this has remained broadly true. Of particular importance to scholars of modern China are resources such as the Special Collections and Archives of the Hong Kong Baptist University, which house a variety of materials on the history of Christianity in China, including rare books and a variety of periodicals that are otherwise not available. Another commonly used resource is the Internal Reference (内部参考) at the Universities Service Center for Chinese Studies Collection at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Written by journalists for an exclusive audience of high-ranking members of the CCP, the Internal Reference is one of the few resources that offer scholars of the PRC insight into the anxieties, priorities, and interests of the country's leadership, filtered through the various articles that they were reading in the period. This is entirely inaccessible outside of this library, and even onsite access requires a special application. Scholars are also limited to copying 400 pages in their lifetime, and while there is a searchable database, it only includes titles of articles, not their content.

UNITED STATES

There is a wealth of material on China in the United States. Below are just some of the larger archival deposits with the broadest range of documents.

National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD
(www.archives.gov)

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds a vast collection of records, including many pertaining to China. The Chinese collection at the NARA archives offers a diverse array of resources that provide valuable insights into the historical, political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of China. Some highlights of this collection include:

- **Diplomatic records:** These records document diplomatic communications and interactions between the United States and China, such as the negotiation of treaties and agreements.
- **Immigration records:** This collection offers valuable information on Chinese immigrants—their experiences and the policies affecting them in the United States, including the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and its subsequent amendments.
- **Military records:** These records document the military engagements and relationships between China and the United States, including US support during World War II and the Korean War, as well as the development of military alliances in the Cold War era.
- **Intelligence records:** This section includes reports and analyses on Chinese political, military, and economic developments, providing insights into US intelligence assessments on China.
- **Trade and economic records:** These documents cover trade and economic relations between the two countries, including trade agreements, tariffs, and economic aid programs.
- **Cultural and scientific exchanges:** The archives also holds records on cultural and educational exchanges, scientific collaborations, and the impact of these exchanges on Sino-American relations.

The Chinese collection at the NARA archives offers a rich and diverse range of resources, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Sino-American relations throughout history. These documents provide valuable insights for researchers and historians interested in understanding the complex relationship between China and the United States.

Rockefeller Archive Center (<https://rockarch.org/>) (<https://ulib.iupui.edu/wmicproject/node/455>)

The Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) has a comprehensive collection on China, specifically related to the history of medicine, science, and technology. The RAC holds a wealth of materials that document the role of the Rockefeller Foundation and other organizations in the development and dissemination of Western scientific, medical, and technological expertise in China during the twentieth century.

Key holdings in the archives include:

- **Medicine and public health:** The RAC contains extensive documentation on the China Medical Board, which was

established by the Rockefeller Foundation to promote the modernization of medical education and public health in China. This includes materials related to the founding of the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) and its operations and impact on the development of Western medicine in China.

- Science and technology: The RAC also holds materials related to the promotion and support of scientific research, education, and technological development in China. This includes resources on the establishment of universities, research institutes, and laboratories as well as the training of Chinese scientists and engineers in Western methods and practices.
- Agriculture and rural development: The RAC has resources that document the efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation and other organizations to modernize Chinese agriculture and improve rural living conditions through the introduction of new farming techniques, crop varieties, and rural development projects.
- Cultural and educational exchange: The RAC contains materials that shed light on the cultural and educational exchanges between China and the West, including the support of Chinese students studying abroad, the training of Chinese faculty, and the establishment of libraries and other cultural institutions.
- Personal papers and correspondence: The RAC also holds personal papers and correspondence from individuals who were instrumental in the transfer of Western knowledge to China, offering firsthand perspectives on the experiences, challenges, and successes of these endeavors.

Other Useful Databases for Research in the US:

- Boston College (religious history): <https://www.bc.edu/bc-web/centers/ricci.html>
- Stanford University: <https://library.stanford.edu/eal>; <https://www.hoover.org/library-archives/collections/asia>
- Columbia University: <https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/eastasian/chinese/about.html>
- Harvard-Yenching Institute: <https://library.harvard.edu/libraries/yenching>
- University of Chicago: <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/about/directory/departments/eastasia/>
- UC Berkeley: <https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/visit/east-asian>

EUROPE

The British National Archives (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>)

The Chinese collection at The National Archives (TNA) in the United Kingdom is a valuable resource for scholars and researchers interested in Chinese history, culture, and Sino-British relations. This collection offers a diverse range of documents and materials that provide insights into various aspects of China's past, including its politics, economy, society, and interactions with Britain. Some highlights of the Chinese collection include:

- **Diplomatic records:** These records document diplomatic relations and communications between Britain and China, covering events such as the Opium Wars, the Treaty of Nanking, the Boxer Rebellion, and the establishment of the People's Republic of China.
- **Trade and economic records:** This collection includes materials related to trade and economic relations between Britain and China, such as trade agreements, tariffs, and records of the British East India Company, which played a significant role in the development of Sino-British trade.
- **Colonial administration records:** These archives contain records related to British administration and governance in territories such as Hong Kong, which was a British colony from 1842 to 1997. These documents provide insights into the legal, administrative, and social aspects of colonial life.
- **Military records:** This collection features records on British military engagements in China, including those related to the Opium Wars, the Boxer Rebellion, and World War II.
- **Personal accounts and narratives:** TNA also holds a variety of personal accounts, letters, diaries, and narratives from British diplomats, merchants, missionaries, and travelers who lived or traveled in China, providing firsthand perspectives on historical events and cultural experiences.
- **Maps and visual materials:** This collection includes maps, photographs, and artworks that depict various aspects of Chinese landscapes, architecture, and society, offering visual insights into China's history and culture from antiquity to the present.

KB Chen China Centre Library, University of Oxford (<https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/libraries/china>)

The KB Chen China Centre Library is a specialized library that holds a diverse collection of resources focused on the study of China—its history, language, culture, politics, and society. The library houses a wide variety of materials, including books, journals, newspapers, maps, and multimedia items. The collection covers topics such as Chinese literature, art, religion, philosophy, economics, and social sciences. The library aims to support academic research and learning about China and its global influence, serving as a valuable resource for students, scholars, and researchers interested in Chinese studies.

- The Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies (TRCCS) is housed at the China Centre Library of the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford. The TRCCS focuses on materials published before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The TRCCS contains approximately 30,000 volumes, including rare books, manuscripts, and local gazetteers. The collection covers various subjects, such as Chinese history, literature, philosophy, religion, and art, with a particular emphasis on the late Qing and Republican periods. The China Centre Library aims to preserve and provide access to these invaluable resources for researchers, students, and scholars studying traditional Chinese culture and history.
- The Serica Project is an initiative of the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford. The project aims to create a digital catalog of the pre-modern Chinese books held in the Bodleian Library's collections. These books are part of the Library's Chinese collections, which include the Backhouse, Maclagan, Morrison, and St. Petersburg manuscript collections, among others. The Serica Project focuses on cataloging and digitizing books printed before 1796, with a goal of providing better access to these invaluable resources for students, researchers, and scholars studying Chinese history, language, and culture. The digital catalog will be searchable in Chinese and English, allowing users to explore and research the library's extensive holdings. The web page provides information about the project, its background, and progress as well as contact information for the project team.

School of Oriental and African Studies, UK (<https://www.soas.ac.uk/research/library/subject-guides/china-and-inner-asia-subject-guide/about-collection>)

The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the UK houses an extensive collection of Chinese materials in its library, which includes books, journals, manuscripts, and other media. SOAS Library has one of the largest collections of Chinese materials in Europe, covering a wide range of subjects, such as Chinese history, literature, philosophy, politics, and society.

- **Chinese collection:** The Chinese collection contains over 180,000 volumes of books and journals, including rare and unique materials. It covers various subjects, with a particular emphasis on social sciences, humanities, and contemporary issues.
- **Chinese manuscripts:** SOAS Library holds a large collection of Chinese manuscripts, including official documents, letters, and literary works. The collection covers various periods of Chinese history, from the Tang dynasty to the present day.
- **Chinese rare books:** The Chinese rare books collection contains over 5,000 rare books and manuscripts, dating back to the sixteenth century. It includes important works on Chinese literature, history, religion, and philosophy.
- **Chinese periodicals:** SOAS Library has a significant collection of Chinese periodicals, including current and historical titles. The collection covers a wide range of subjects, including politics, economics, culture, and society.
- **Chinese archives:** SOAS Library also holds several Chinese archives, including the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation Archive, the Taiwan Resource Center for Chinese Studies, and the 1950s Chinese Political Trials Archive. These archives provide valuable resources for researchers studying modern Chinese history, politics, and society.

Wellcome Chinese Collection, UK (<https://wellcomecollection.org/>)

The Wellcome Collection in the UK houses an impressive array of Chinese artifacts, reflecting the rich history and culture of China, with a specific focus on medicine, health, and well-being. The collection includes objects related to traditional Chinese medicine, such as acupuncture needles, herbal medicine samples, and medical texts. It also features artifacts related to the broader Chinese culture, such as ceramics, paintings, and decorative items. The Chinese collection at the Wellcome Collection serves

as a valuable resource for researchers, students, and visitors interested in exploring the history and practices of Chinese medicine and culture.

The SASS Collection of Intellectual, Social, and Technological History of the People's Republic of China at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) (<https://www.sass.phil.fau.de/>)

The SASS Collection of Intellectual, Social, and Technological History of the People's Republic of China at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) is an extensive and valuable resource for researchers and scholars interested in the study of modern China. This collection focuses on the intellectual, social, and technological aspects of the PRC, providing a comprehensive look into the country's development since its establishment in 1949.

Key features of the SASS Collection at FAU include:

- **Intellectual history:** The collection offers a wide array of materials that shed light on the intellectual discourse and ideological development within the PRC. This includes resources on political thought, philosophy, literature, and the arts as well as the interplay between traditional Chinese culture and modern ideologies.
- **Social history:** The collection provides insights into the social changes that have taken place in the PRC, including the impact of policies such as the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and the One-Child Policy. It covers topics such as social structures, family life, education, healthcare, and urbanization.
- **Technological history:** The SASS Collection also focuses on the evolution of technology in the PRC, covering areas such as industrialization, agricultural modernization, infrastructure development, and advancements in science and technology. This includes resources on China's space program, nuclear capabilities, and the growth of its information and communication technology sector.
- **Diverse resources:** The collection houses a variety of materials, including books, journals, government documents, photographs, maps, and multimedia resources, providing researchers with a comprehensive and multidisciplinary perspective on the PRC's history.

Leiden University East Asian Library (<https://www.library.universiteitleiden.nl/about-us/library-locations/asian-library>)

Leiden University Libraries hold several Chinese special collections in its East Asian Library. These collections include rare books, manuscripts, maps, and other unique materials, spanning a range of subjects such as literature, history, philosophy, religion, and art:

- **Legge Collection:** The Legge Collection is a significant collection of rare books and manuscripts related to Chinese language, literature, and culture. It includes works by the Scottish sinologist James Legge and other important scholars, totaling over 8,000 volumes.
- **Chinese Rubbings Collection:** The Chinese Rubbings Collection is a unique collection of over 10,000 rubbings of ancient Chinese inscriptions. The collection spans several dynasties and covers topics such as calligraphy, art, and history.
- **Chinese Rare Books Collection:** The Chinese Rare Books Collection is a collection of rare and important works printed during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It includes over 7,000 works and covers subjects such as literature, history, philosophy, and religion.
- **Liu Song Collection:** The Liu Song Collection is a personal archive of the renowned scholar Liu Song. It includes manuscripts, notes, and other documents related to his research on Chinese literature and culture.
- **Chinese Legal Manuscripts Collection:** The Chinese Legal Manuscripts Collection is a collection of rare manuscripts related to Chinese law and legal history. It includes documents dating back to the Tang dynasty and covers various legal topics such as civil law, criminal law, and administrative law.

Other useful databases:

- Israel: <http://www.jewsofchina.org/about>
- Russia: <http://rgiadv.ru/>
- France: <https://www.bnf.fr/fr>

Acknowledgments

First, we would like to thank everyone who participated in our survey, ranging from senior professors and academics to graduate students throughout the United States. We are also grateful for the helpful comments and critiques we received from our reviewers: Professor Michelle T. King and her graduate students at UNC Chapel Hill, and Jasmine Clark, Digital Scholarship Librarian at Temple University. Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to the many interlocutors on the ground in the People's Republic of China, both academics and non-academics, who made this write-up possible by verifying the status of various archives and regulations. Understandably, they preferred to remain anonymous.

This brief manual is not meant to be comprehensive, and though we made every effort to ensure content accuracy, we take sole responsibility for any mistakes found in this document. We dedicate this work to those who continue to fight to make research and scholarly inquiry possible despite strained relations between the US and the PRC and changing restrictions on research in China. It is our abiding hope that one day this manual will no longer be necessary.

About the Authors

Matthew Wong Foreman is a PhD candidate at Northwestern University. His research focuses on the historical conditions that gave rise to the emergence of the racialized category “mixed-race” in the Chinese imagination over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A CLIR-Mellon Dissertation Fellow (2019–2020), Foreman spent extensive time in the PRC from 2016 to 2020 conducting fieldwork in municipal, provincial, and village archives across six cities in four provinces, and he has built up a personal network of local archivists, scholars, and bureaucrats. He was an undergraduate student at Hong Kong University and a graduate student at the University of Oxford.

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