



**Proposal Defense**  
***Doctor of Philosophy in Library and Information Science***

**“Bridging Sight and Insight: Visualization in Action among Digital Humanists” by  
Rongqian Ma**

**Date:** December 7, 2020

**Time:** 10:30am– 12:30pm

**Place:** [https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bJXXs4esPRiXRjv](https://pitt.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bJXXs4esPRiXRjv)

**Committee:**

- James “Kip” Currier, Assistant Professor, School of Computing and Information
- Ruth Mostern, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Pittsburgh
- Daqing He, Professor, School of Computing and Information
- Sheila Corral, Independent Scholar

**Abstract:**

This dissertation project addresses visualization practices in the field of digital humanities (DH). Emerging from the 1950s, digital humanities have gradually developed into an interdisciplinary research field yet with various debates and issues worth of in-depth exploration (Schreibman et al., 2004). One of the central concerns in the field of DH is the *identity* and *definition* of DH, about which scholars have had intensive theoretical discussions but yet to achieve an agreement (Schreibman et al. 2004; Cohen et al. 2011; Burdick et al. 2012; Terras et al. 2013; Gold et al. 2016; Schreibman et al. 2016). The plural ontological discussions on what *should* or *should not* count as DH, however, did not offer sufficient insights on grasping the *shape* of the field. What does the status quo *actually* look like? How do communities of practice engage in and influence the development of the field?

In this dissertation, I argue it is the empirical, undergoing *communities of practice* that offers a meaningful lens to observe the shifts of fashion and identities of DH; and particularly that visualization, with its increasing scale of application in the DH scholarship (Flanders and Jannidis 2019; Schreibman et al. 2016), serves as a good area of practice for such empirical, ethnographic observations. Specifically, I take a Latourian approach to investigate how digital humanists – broadly defined as any researchers or practitioners engaging in DH work – leverage visualizations as a form of “immutable mobiles” (Latour 1990) to present findings and support claims in *research outputs* (i.e., DH journal articles) and work together on visualizations in *research processes*. Applying ethnographic methods and focusing on the empirical analysis, this project aims to engage with the broad, dynamic discussions on the extension of DH with specific contributions on 1) developing an operational topology of DH visualizations, 2) picturing how communities of practice connect on their relations to visualization, and 3) developing a set of best practices of visualization for digital humanists.