

The Value of Archives in the Modern Identity

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Summary

Identity recognition in modern archival field faces two main challenges. One is the unique impact of archives on the citizens' identity recognition in the process of social development and changes. The other is the professional identity recognition of archivists in the changing archival landscape. On one hand, archives can provide legitimate evidences for identity recognition. The scope and structure of archives affect the rights of citizen identity recognition. The provenance of archives is the basis to ensure the evidential value and knowledge value of archives. And essentially the identity recognition process is based on interest recognition and value recognition of information sharing. On the other hand, the basic clue of social function and social status development of archival profession lies in the forward and backward process between regime appendages and social memory managers. Only by integrating archives into various business and social life aspects can the gap be bridged between the roles archivists seek to play and the actual roles they play, archivists can acquire new cognition of values and sense of belonging from their new roles.

I

Identity is one question we all ask ourselves and continue to ask in one form or another throughout our lives. Ever since their births, human beings face the questions of "Who am I?", "How my identity is formed? ", "What is the value of my being? " and such identity issues that need to be answered. Social transformation constantly changes the status and significance of this kind of questions, yet has never diminished its existence. Identity is an evolving concept, and has a different meaning in different historical periods. Modern identity recognition becomes an ever crucial subject since, on one hand the exchange of information and cultural consciousness promotes the awareness of individual identity and mentality; and on the other hand the society faces more and more uncertainties which in turn inevitably infuses more uncertain factors into the self-cognition, leading to the generalization tendency of identity recognition and the formation of its complexities.

Identity recognition in modern archival field faces two main challenges. One is the unique impact of archives on the citizens' identity recognition in the process of social development and changes. The other is the professional identity recognition of archivists in the changing archival landscape.

The gigantic wheels in this ever accelerating modern society have crushed countless once-solid orders and widely accepted rules. The restructuring of national political system and economic structure, the adjustment of international relationships, the rises and falls of different group interests and statuses, the oscillation of the world's and nations' economic situations, the ebbs and flows of century-old enterprises, the ups and downs of popular figures, the ravage of major disasters, and all these kinds of events have never been so frequently happening as violently and dramatic

like today. All those uncanny global Prophets were stunned and speechless in front of the so many unexpected events. "Unexpected" now often becomes the not-so-unexpected outcomes in the world today. China's rapid economic growth and social transformation have a lot of people experience major changes of their social roles. In the context of such a society, people unconsciously, sometimes after losing their homes – in the process of looking for "new" homes, bid farewell to the old life and identity, reposition their attributions and roles, reconstruct social relations, and look for new hopes, values and dreams.

Information technology profoundly involves in the transformation of social structure and identity, as "Internet users" become a new definition of population. The richness and interactivity of network information greatly affects people's understanding and judgment of the world, and the perception and exploration of life. In the online world, distances, communities now all have changed meanings from the past. People far away can freely and conveniently talk to each other, sharing common interests and aspirations, and even form online communities; and people who have "seen" each other frequently on line only know so little about each other, just like a random encounter in a masquerade ball without much of empathy and common sense of belonging. Informationization constantly changes the way people live their lives, the socio-economic structure and the organizational structure. The richness and weakness, and the reality and surreality of the internet world, and the closeness and alienation of people's relationships further lead to their pursuits and confusion of spiritual belonging.

The richness of social life and the improvement of people's education have made the multi features of their identity recognition more significant and deepening. The enhancement of the sense of having individual roles raises the sensitivity of identity recognition in different dimensions and the self-awareness if a comprehensive recognition. Besides the more definite elements, such as gender, age, family, profession, social class, ethnics, and nationality, the sense of identity and belonging in the non-official relationships among all kinds of communities, populations, and occasions are also gradually perceived and recognized. Under certain circumstances, people may feel some differences of identity along some dimension, and through a variety of specific differences, identify themselves with comprehensive differentiation.

In the modern society, the existence and activities of the individuals are more closely embedded in the collective presence and activities, and therefore identity recognition must include both the individual identity and the collective identity. These two angle differently yet are intertwined and also mutually shaping each other. Individual identity constitutes the collective identity, and without the sense of individual identity, the sense of collective identity loses the possibility and basis of existence; collective identity promotes the individual identity and guides the ultimate development direction of individuality recognition.

Social development and information technology have changed the space and content of archival work and forced archivists to reexamine their professional development, positioning and value. The professional identity of archivists has both the individual identity characterized by the individual occupational orientation, and the collective identity characterized by general occupational function, social status, and value evaluation. The directional change of different individuals, institutions, and regional archival work varies very much. The expansion or contraction of the

professional spaces, and the centralization or marginalization of the occupational status all have a direct impact on the archivists' professional self-esteem and development anticipation, which become objective conditions and important elements of identity recognition in the archival field.

II

Identity recognition cannot be separated from collective memory. French sociologist Alfred Grosser believes that “the part of experience is determined by personal memories, but more importantly determined by the so-called ‘Collective memory’ transmitted via the family, school and the media.” “Whether it is actively pursued or is forced upon, a limited identity is almost always based on a call from the ‘collective memory’”.^[1] The pursuit of identity recognition confirms the individual or collective senses of social status, belonging and values. The participants of the confirmation process include self-beliefs, value propositions, emotions, and interests as well as public opinion, others’ comments and a variety of elements. The “collective memory” is an influential and irreplaceable element of this confirmation process, and often exists with the composition of above-mentioned various elements to become the most important psychological basis of modern identity recognition.

As for the research methodology, both structural and historical methodologies have their own strengths complementing each other. The structural approach and the contemporary attitude are beneficial for people to recognize the internal relationships and structure of the problems, and discover the transition of the structurality and integrity of modern social identity; and the historical methodology and the experimental attitude are conducive for people to see the causes and consequences of the problems, and by focusing on the research of the modern identity’s historical clues, historical trends and historical evolution, to reach a historical depth. By comparison, the historical methodology has a more prominent value toward identity recognition value. And for this, Canadian scholar Charles Taylor gives two explanations: one is only by the very detailed analysis like archeology study on history can the objectivity and accuracy of the facts investigated be ensured. “Instant snapshot will miss a lot of things”. Second is “only by increasing the depth of history perspective can we dig up the deeply buried but still useful in modern life”.^[2] In other words, historical traces do not only provide identity recognition with diachronic clues, traces and basis, but also establish the strong ties of identity continuity from the historical facts and logical deduction and confirmation of today.

Modern Identity recognition, in the face of complex backgrounds, makes “identity crisis” gradually from being latent to obvious, shallow to deep, and from specific to general. Its main characteristics are manifested as the non-continuity, fragmentation, and unstableness of the identity recognition, as well as the “loss of resonance, depth or richness”.^[3] In-depth analysis of the appearance of the identity crisis can help discover with a considerable degree that disruption happens between the parts and the whole and the reality and the past, which leads to the frustration of the accustomed judgment and the deformation of expected results. The combination of the structural methodology

and historical methodology can play an important role in repairing the broken, explaining the lost, looking for the logic, and connecting the links.

“Collective memory” contains rich basis of the structural methodology and historical methodology. However, its various forms of expression and ways of heritage also contain many parts that cannot be confirmed or used. In the “collective memory”, archives are original, credible, having been solidly deposited and passed down according to certain rules. Archives can provide legitimate evidences for identity recognition, and deepen and strengthen the solid sense of identity. In the last century, Canadian archivist Terry Cook clearly described the natural connection between archives and identity recognitions, “While the maintenance of government accountability and administrative continuity and the protection of personal rights are still rightly recognized as important purposes for archives, the principal justification for archives to most users and to the public at large rests on archives being able to offer citizens a sense of identity, locality, history, culture, and personal and collective memory.”^[4] Thus in the process of identity recognition, archives become a solid base for the structural methodology and historical methodology.

Identity recognition is the integration of the opposites of similarities and differences, and it is an affirmation of the properties of nationality, region, ethnicity, family, and vocation by individuals or groups. It also shows the difference and exclusion from other properties such as nationality, region, ethnicity, family, and vocation. This kind of cognition of similarities and differences needs to be based on real and continuous information. And archives are exactly the real and continuous records of social life that are based on units of nationality, region, and ethnicity, enough to support people’s confirmation of “ourselves”, and distinction from “them”. Identity recognition has two facets, which are realized by tracing back in history to find the same social genes, and by cultural comparison with other communities, organizations to find their own belonging. The retrospect and judgment also need to be based on real and continuous information. From the perspective of depth, archives serve as a history scroll that runs from ancient to modern times and provides historical analysis with traceable and continuous material; from the perspective of breadth, archives are panoramic images covering every aspect of social life, which can provide the structural analysis of identity recognition with material of multiple perspectives and multiple layers. Archives are not only authentic and continuous, but also have characteristics of integrity and combinability. Fragments of information are often brief, one-dimensional and superficial, which is not sufficient to support the deep cognition of self-belonging; while authentic, continuous, complete, combined information is long-lasting, multi-dimensional and in-depth, which can become the rational foundation of people's faith and a sense of belonging . Therefore, archives are both the criterion of identity recognition, and the structure of it. Archives build up the logic and legitimacy of social existence and from which delves the historical clues and factual credentials of modern identity recognition, form the informational base of assimilation of the similarity and differentiation with depth and breadth, and resonant with the self within each one of us.

III

After we have confirmed the relationship of archives and identity recognition, the next thing is to strive to make archives play a more active role in the identity recognition of citizens, and improvements need to be made in the following at least:

First, the scope and structure of archives affect the rights of citizen identity recognition. The missing of archives may result in the lack of legitimacy of identity recognition. Therefore, the most important is to build an archival system that can support citizens' identity recognition. Terry Cook believes that "archivists are also involved in the formation of archives", because archivists have the responsibility and authority for selecting and preserving archives.^[5] In the modern society, no matter what occupation and what class that a citizen belongs to, he/she will face self-identification and needs the support of archives; the multidimensionality of identity recognition requires responses of archives from different angles; the different environments (such as physical environment and internet environment) that enable the sense of identity and belonging require different forms of archives to record and prove; the structural methodology of identity recognition requires archives to have integrated records of societies. The historical methodology requires archives to trace back the continuous footprint through social evolution. This is a great challenge for the collection of archives: it is impossible to keep record of all social activities. How to sift and select genuine, phenomenal, and potentially long lasting historic sediments to construct a system of collective memory that is valuable and reflects a full picture of societies? Under the conditions of the coexistence of physical records and digital records, and the more and more socialization of recording methodology, how authentic records can be identified with important social values? Facing increasingly complex digital records, how to ensure that they are long-term authentic, reliable, complete and usable in the ever changing environment of software and hardware? These are all great challenges to the responsibility, intelligence and capability of modern archivists.

Second, the provenance of archives is as important as archival holdings themselves, which is the basis to ensure the evidential value and knowledge value of archives, and also the basis of people's trust of the records and the self-identity confirmed by the archives. "Provenance, context, evolution, and instructions all imply a perception, and suggest knowledge"^[6] if the ability to understand, implication and knowledge weaken, the credibility of identity recognition we obtained from archives will definitely diminish. The concept of provenance and the maintenance methods of provenance in the digital era have changed, especially from focusing on the records and records creating organizations towards focusing on the relationships among records, organization missions, and functions and operational activities, from a focus on the maintenance of the physical order of records to the capture and maintenance of context information. The only thing that cannot be changed is that archivists must ensure the existence and interpretability of the provenance links between archives.

Third, archives locked in a closed warehouse cannot help citizens to improve identity recognition, but instead they can be an impediment stuck in history and present, speculation and truth, individual and society. Identity recognition as a social unification contains three layers of meanings: information unification, interest unification and value unification. Essentially the identity recognition process is based on interest recognition and value recognition of

information sharing. Without fully shared information, interest unification and value unification are missing the foundation and connections, like rootless flowers or a plate of random sands. When archives are shielded, the right to access information on self-cognition is in some sense denied, and to that end, maximizing the openness and free sharing of records, returning more archival information to the public have become a call of modern social justice and citizens' equality, which is also a requirement of improving citizens identity recognition. As the United States scholar Steven Lubar pointed out, "archives are creators and reinforcers of power and authority ", "the creation of archives indicates the creation of power, same for the use of archives."^[7]

The support of the archives openness of citizens' identity recognition requires double insurance of both policies and tools, which conditions upon each other and supports each other. Good policies empower citizens to utilize archives, and clarify what citizens can take advantage of without any detriment to the interests of the society and others; good tools (such as database and retrieval system) empower citizens to be able to use archives, thus successfully achieve archival utilization. The threat to public information and the abuse of personal data in the internet era makes a number of governmental and archival departments hesitate between open and defensive approaches, which created new conflicts among the increasingly needs of records from citizens. Therefore, developing and implementing an active, rational policy, creating more tools in line with citizens' needs and conventions is an important measure to broaden the access to archives.

Let's take the example of the effect on the marginalized identity recognition from the archival structure in China, which is in the social transformation period. In this period, China's socio-economic structures, cultural patterns, value concepts have been undergoing deep changes, leading to a number of uncertainties of identity recognition. In the last 30 years, the important impact on China's social structure is the urbanization process. Its size and speed is unprecedented in human history. China's urban population increased from 172.45 million in 1978 to 690.79 million in 2011. It is a surge of over 500 million people in the past 30 years. The proportion of urban population has increased from 17.92% to 51.27%, which is approximately equivalent to over 100 years of transition in many developed countries. The identity transformation of this large number of people presents enormous challenges to social management, and many complex factors make a significant portion of the population unable to achieve a synchronized psychological transformation, causing various deviations and confusions in their identity recognition.

There are significant "semi-urbanization" characteristics in China at the present stage, mainly manifest as the fact that many peasants are not in the full sense transitioning into urban residents, but merely become "urban labor force". China's household registration system divides the population into agricultural and non-agricultural population. In the fast push of the urbanization process, a large number of rural labor force surplus enter the cities, forming a large "migrant workers" group. These migrant workers left their lands and agricultural activities to work and live in urban environment. But their identity in the city is "transient population", and their legal identity continues to be peasants, which does not give them the equal access to public services and other rights as urban residents, and does not permit them to become true urban citizens. Some of them have already been living in the city for a long time, almost completely "uprooted" from their rural origination, yet cannot "root" themselves in the city and have no ways to be

truly integrated into the urban society. This kind of "rootless" situation deprives them of a real sense of belonging to either rural or urban population and this sense of wandering causes confusions about their own identities and even identity crisis.

In fact, the "transient population" is an important part in many cities. According to the data from China's sixth national census, in 2010, Beijing's migrant population represents 35.9% of all of the resident population, and Shanghai 39%, Shenzhen as high as 77%. However, for a long time, the situation of this population is basically blank or a grey area in the world of archives. The archival system intentionally or unintentionally ignores their existence. Besides the simple work logs (some local companies do not even have work logs, or discard the logs after a brief period of time), the city they have been living in almost have no recording of them. This aggravates their sense of alienation of city and also creates barren area of city memories. And there are also no traces of their lives and activities in rural areas either, so that individually, peasants cannot find consistent and accurate records, and group-wise, there are also no stories to be found on their living conditions. So, before long in the near future, this enormous crowd in the social transformation period in China will soon become a huge blind spot in history. A fundamental question of identity recognition such as "Who am I" cannot be answered by the migrant workers themselves, nor by the cities they live, nor their rural hometowns. Their decedents and future cities would have nowhere to find the answer. They would become the "phantom public" who has walked through the era yet left no traces.

In recent years, China's archivists have begun to look into this marginalized group. The goal is to maintain the diversity of social structure and the integrity of collective memories in this transitional period, and to coordinate with the government's push of public service parity. Some local governments have established specialized archival management policies for the transient population that includes migrant workers, and requires labor-hiring institutions or companies to establish workers personnel records and custody system. Some areas have created special theme database for migrant workers and other transient populations, and the establishment of regional small-scale "Migrant workers Archives" have already started^[8]. Despite the relative simplicity of the current types of archival collection and management, these efforts express the willingness of acceptance of this marginalized population by cities. Therefore their life today can be partially included in the writing of history, and their individual memory might be able to morph into the collective memory. So this is a good start.

China's archival institutions still have a lot to do with the once ignored population, such as embedding the archives formation and management processes into the "gridding management" promoted by many cities in China, developing universal network of archives preservation for all individuals, families and communities including the transient population, thus to make it possible for citizens' archives to be included into the national archives, so as to enable the collective memory to contain the individual memory of under-privileged groups such as migrant workers. Archival institutions can also enrich the contents of marginalized groups recording through various means, lead them to utilize archives, host special archival exhibitions for them, help them to understand the cities they live, and

gradually integrate themselves into it from the psychological perspective, and eliminate the sense of wandering, eventually obtaining a new identity recognition.

IV

Archivists' own career perception and the social comments on the profession cast influence on each other. A substantial number of archivists exclaimed or complained about the lack of public attention, understanding and respect toward the archival profession, and missing support and recognition from the Government. This marginalization characteristic reduces the archivists' professional pride and honor. Some are even entrapped in the continuous and sustainable occupational identity disorder and cannot extricate themselves. What's worth pondering is, why can't we pass the noble values of public archival profession to the general public and bridge the gap between social cognition and its true value? What is the root of the psychological loss of archivists? If we give up the one-way thinking from some aspect of the society or profession, but to look for an answer from the deep relationship between society and archives, maybe we can get out of the identity dilemma, and find a new world of cognition and affection.

Many archival theories regard archives as reflections or mirror images of a social life, and rarely visit their essential roots in social life, social construction, social development, and social structure, thus ignoring their dynamic interactions associated with today's society. Such cognition and practice intentionally or unintentionally banish archives to the sideway of the society and downplay relations of archives and modern social life. It is almost like that archives only need to be looked back tomorrow. Then there is no surprise of the marginalization of the archival profession. Indeed, in every era archives are not only images of the contemporary life, but also the confirmations of individuals' and groups' social roles and behaviors in their unique ways. They affect the contemporary human being's psychology, emotion and cognition, involve in the construction of collective memory, and thus participate in shaping social processes and social structure. Archives administration is essentially a social behavior that confirms and manages social practice, social cognition and recognition process, thus is necessarily a part of the social process, an element of the social structure. If archivists are able to consciously promote the archives administration in the social processes and exercise of their social responsibility, the relationship between archival profession and social reality will be harmonious, and archival profession could gradually move away from the sideway and integrate into the whole structure.

The basic clue of social function and social status development of archival profession lies in the forward and backward process between regime appendages and social memory managers. The coexistence and interaction of two functions have long been embedded in the changes of social system and culture, while the occupational self-consciousness of archivists has important influence on the speed and extent of the changes. Three changes in the contemporary archival work directly project onto archivists' perception of their own identity and value proposition: First, the degree of the transition from records-driven approach to business-driven approach reflects the distance

between archivists and institutions, regions, and social activity centers; secondly, the degree of the transition from single function of custody to complex functions of audit, information services and custody reflects archivists' influence on other sectors, staff and the public; thirdly, the degree of the transition from manual management systems to network information management systems reflects archivists' professional abilities and irreplaceability. The essence of these changes is all derived from change from the passive projection to active participation in shaping social life. The resonance of these changes put the archival profession in a mass transformation process, either usher in a new identity, status and value with a new life or gradually losing its vitality with the old life and wearing down.

Many uncertainties of archival profession cause contemporary archivists anxiety and confusion toward their occupational status and prospects. The main sticking point is the difficult choice between "status quo" and "change". Sticking to the old way is easy but can have a painful cost of personal backwardness and increasing career marginalization; proactive change can potentially create new archival functions and images and expand archives' contribution to institutions and societies, but has to face great challenges and discomforts from institutions, existing methodologies, knowledge, and technologies. Whether it can be transferred "from the silent archival shelves next to God's side"^[9], "from the basement to the presidential suite"^[10] does not depend on the calls of God's commands but on the actions from archivists themselves. Overall, this era has given a great development opportunity to archival enterprise; however, for each specific archivist and archival institution, the fate of either advancing or retreating, either progressing or declining still co-exists. Only the influence of archives for social life can determine social attitude for archives as a profession and provide status for archival profession. Only by introducing changes even under difficulties and integrating archives into various business and social life aspects can the gap be bridged between the roles archivists seek to play and the actual roles they play; and the divergence be narrowed between every expanding social demands and the responsiveness and capabilities of archival professionals, and archivists can eliminate confusion in the changes, resolve the sense of loss in the collision, confidently renew their responsibilities and social roles, and acquire new cognition of values and sense of belonging from their new responsibilities and roles.

[1] [France] Alfred Grosser, *Les identités difficiles*, translated by Wang Kun, Social Science Press, 2010, p 3.

[2] [United States] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, translated by Han Zhen, Yi Lin Press, p 784.

[3] [United States] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, translated by Han Zhen, Yi Lin Press, Introduction, p 3.

[4] [Canada] Terry Cook, *What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift*, ICA 13th Congress Proceedings, Chinese Archives Press, 1997.

[5] [Canada] Terry Cook, *No Innocent Deposits: Forming Archives by Rethinking Appraisal*, *American Archivist*, Volume68, No. 1, Spring/ Summer 2005, pp164 - 168.

[6] [Netherlands] Quoted in Eric Ketelaar, *Exploitation of New Archival Materials*, translated by Shen Lihua, ICA 11th Congress Proceedings, Chinese Archives Press, 1990, p 142.

[7] [United States] Steven Lubar, *Information Culture and the Archival Record*, translated by Zhang Ning, Shanxi Archives, 2000(1).

[8] E.g. Harbin Migrant Workers Archives.

[9] [Canada] Terry Cook, *Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era*, translated by Liu Yuenan, Shanxi Archives, 1997(2).

[10] [United States] James Lundy, Mark Gilbert, Debra Logan, "Records Management Heats Up After Sarbanes-Oxley", <http://www3.gartner.com>, 2003-03-21.