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Dancing with the state: the emergence and survival of community archives in mainland China

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ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic fieldwork on community archives in mainland China, this article identifies three models of community archives in mainland China, and reveals reasons for the emergence and survival of community-based archives in mainland China: first, the regulations on non-governmental museums and social organisations can provide the legal basis for the emergence and survival of community-based archives despite the fact that the archival legislative framework, the centralised archives management system and the dominant statist archival paradigm seem to leave little room for their emergence and development; second, the purposes of establishing community-based archives can be consistent with or not contradictory to the political, social and cultural development strategies of the state; third, the relationship of contingent symbiosis between government and community archives can create spaces for the emergence and survival of community-based archives.

KEYWORDS

Community; community archives; community-based archiving; non-governmental museum

Introduction

During the past two decades, the community-based archives movement has been booming in English-speaking countries like the UK and USA, and has become a focus of English language scholarship. It is categorised as a form of archival activism,¹ aiming to fight against symbolic annihilation and empower marginalised communities to tell their own stories on their own terms.² The definition of community archives,³ the conceptual impact of community archives on archival theory and practice,⁴ and the development, challenges and impact of community-based archiving in the UK, USA and other countries have been examined in English language scholarship.⁵ Terry Cook posited that community is the key concept of the fourth archival paradigm in the Western world.⁶

The social, political and cultural contexts in mainland China are different from those in English-speaking countries; in particular, the Party-State is seen as authoritarian, which would hinder the emergence and survival of community archives. Indeed, the term ‘community archives’ used in English language scholarship has not appeared in Chinese archives law or regulations or government policies, and was never used in Chinese language scholarship until 2014 when the first Chinese paper introducing community archives in English-speaking countries was published in a Chinese archival

journal.⁷ It seems that there is little room for the emergence and survival of community-based archives in mainland China. However, there are many identity-based communities such as ethnic minorities, migrant workers, educated urban youth during the Cultural Revolution, as well as locality-based communities in mainland China. These communities have created their own records, and there are some distinctive community archives in mainland China. What then is the status of community archives in mainland China? Why can they emerge and survive in mainland China? What implications do community archives have for Chinese archival studies?

To answer these research questions, this article first introduces some background information on archives management and the legal basis for the emergence and development of community-based archives in mainland China; then, it presents three models of community archives by using case studies, and discusses the reasons why community archives can emerge and survive; lastly, this article illustrates the implications of community archives for Chinese archival studies and proposes some issues that need to be further studied.

Translation of the term ‘community archives’ and research methodology

The first issue that the research has had to grapple with is the translation of the term ‘community archives’ used in English language scholarship into Chinese because there is no corresponding Chinese term. It is widely accepted that the term ‘community’ in English language scholarship refers to a group of people who define themselves on the basis of locality, culture, faith, background, or other shared identity or interest,⁸ and a ‘community archives’ is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality.⁹ The term ‘community’ has been perceived as referring to a locality-based community (*Shequ* in Chinese) in mainland China since it was initially imported by some students of the then Yenching University in 1933 who introduced the ideas of American urban sociologist Robert Park to China. The students translated the term ‘community’ in Park’s ideas into *Shequ* in Chinese, which refers to a group of people living in the same area and thus forming a cooperative and having a mutual-assistance relationship.¹⁰

The Chinese term ‘*Shequ*’ and its definition have been widely used in government policies and regulations in mainland China, for example, the ‘Opinions of the Minister of Civil Affairs on the Promotion of City Community (*Shequ*) Construction in China’¹¹ issued in 2000 states that ‘community (*Shequ*)’ is a social community (*Shequ*) consisting of the people living in the same area, and a city community (*Shequ*) is under the jurisdiction of the residents committee. According to the *Organic Law of the Urban Residents Committees of the PRC*,¹² an urban residents committee is a mass organisation for self-governance at the grassroots level established by the government of a city not divided into districts or of a municipal district, and a residents committee shall generally be established for an area inhabited by 100–700 households on the basis of residential status in order to facilitate their self-governance. Based on the definition of community (*Shequ*), the *Regulation on the City Community (*Shequ*) Archives Management*¹³ jointly issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the State Archives Administration of China (SAAC) in 2015 states that community (*Shequ*) archives refer to various forms of valuable historical documentations created in the construction of a community (*Shequ*) by the community (*Shequ*) Party organisation, residents committee, community (*Shequ*) service

organisations, community (*Shequ*) social organisations and residents of the community (*Shequ*) in various media. The regulation stipulates that community (*Shequ*) archival work is supervised and guided by local sub-district office established by the government of a city not divided into districts or of a municipal district as its field office, archives administration and civil affairs department. It also lists the scope of community (*Shequ*) records that should be archived, which primarily includes the records created by the community (*Shequ*) Party organisation and the residents committee when they conduct community (*Shequ*) management. As such, the term ‘city community (*Shequ*) archives’ in mainland China is basically different from the term ‘community archives’ in English language scholarship. If ‘community’ in English is translated by *Shequ* in Chinese, the term ‘community archives’ used in English language scholarship would lose its meaning and be confused with ‘city community (*Shequ*) archives’ in Chinese. Therefore, the author translates the English term ‘community’ by *Shequn* (similar to social groups) in Chinese, thus differentiating ‘community archives’ from ‘city community archives’.

This research is mainly based on the ethnographic fieldwork on community (*Shequn*) archives in China conducted by the author from September 2014 to August 2019. During this time, the author chose several community archives including the Migrant Workers Museum in Guangzhou, the Chinese Sex Slavery Victims History Museum, and the PiCun Culture and Art Museum of Migrant Labour as case studies, conducting participatory observation and in-depth interviews with the founder(s) and the staff of the community archives on issues including motivation for the establishment of the community archives, their development and challenges, and the survival and sustainability strategies of the community archives. Visitors were randomly interviewed to learn why they visited the museums that held the community archives and what they thought about the museums. Other materials including media reports on the community archives were collected. Besides these case studies, the author also collected materials and interviewed the founder(s) or the staff of other community archives including the Memorial Hall of the Victims of Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders, the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, and Hongkong Pokfulam Village Community Archives, and six archivists from six state archives in mainland China were interviewed to assess their understanding of community archives and the status of the community archives kept in state archives.

Chinese literatures on community archives

Since the term ‘community archives’ as it is used in English language scholarship was imported into China in 2014, it has obtained attention from some researchers, but the research is scanty, and there are few empirical studies on community archives in China. *Archival Science Bulletin* and *Archival Science Study*, the two archival journals listed in the CSSCI (Chinese Social Science Citation Index), can be taken as examples. During the past six years (2014–2020), only eight papers on community archives have been published in these journals, five of which focus on the introduction of the community archives movement or cases in English-speaking countries and the implications for the construction of community archives in China.¹⁴ The other three concentrate on Chinese community archives. In the first one, Li discusses the significance, obstacles and ways of community archives construction in China, and argues that the spiritual pursuit of harmony and convergence, valuing the geopolitics, and the lack of consciousness of

community identity are the main obstacles to community archives construction in China.¹⁵ In the second one, Qiao analyses the cultural identity value of community archives and the realisation of their value in China.¹⁶ Only Ma *et al.* explore the function and impact of a community archives in China: the PiCun Cultural Museum of Migrant Labour, an independent community archives which preserves the archives of migrant workers in China.¹⁷

The existing research on some specific identity-based community archives such as ethnic minority archives or migrant workers archives is usually conducted from the perspective of state archives rather than from that of community archives. For example, the studies on ethnic minority archives are mainly concerned with the measures that state archives should take to preserve ethnic minority archives in order to realise the goal of the three systems (i.e. the archival resources system that covers the archives created by the people, the archives service system that is convenient for the people to use, and the archives security guarantee system that can safeguard the national archival resources) proposed by the SAAC, including developing relevant regulations and standards, and emphasising the centralised management of ethnic minority archives.¹⁸

Some background information on archives management in mainland China

The archival legislative framework, the centralised archives management system and the dominant statist archival paradigm in mainland China are not conducive to the emergence and development of community-based archives, but the regulations on the establishment of non-governmental museums and social organisations can provide the legal basis for their emergence and development in mainland China.

Legislative framework

Gilliland and Štefanac argued that a strong presence of community archives is dependent not only on societal and cultural factors but also on the legislative and regulatory frameworks within which archives and other memory institutions operate.¹⁹ The term ‘community archives’ in English language scholarship, whether as a kind of archival resource or as a kind of archival institution, never appeared in the *Archives Law of China* or other related archives regulations. For example, community archives are not mentioned or included in the archives acquisition scope of state archives stipulated by the *Regulations on the Archives Acquisition Scope of Archival Institutions at All Levels*²⁰ issued by the SAAC in 2011. According to the *Archives Law of China*, archival institutions in mainland China consist of state archives, specialised archives, department archives, enterprise archives and archives rooms established by government agencies, enterprises or other organisations. State archives are established by government and are in charge of receiving, collecting, arranging and keeping valuable archives within their jurisdiction and making the archives available to the public. Specialised archives refer to the archival institutions collecting and managing special archives such as movies archives, or pictures archives, and they are usually established by government. Department archives are established by the ministries and commissions of the State Council, for example the Foreign Ministry archives. Enterprise archives are those built by enterprises. Archives rooms are an internal unit of a government agency, enterprise or other organisation to

preserve their own archives. Hence, community archives are not officially regarded as a kind of archival resources or as a kind of archival institution in mainland China.

The centralised archives management system

The centralised archives management system in mainland China was imported from the Soviet Union in the 1950s. After the Russian Revolution, several decrees relating to archives had been issued, including the July 1919 decree. This decree abolished private ownership of archives and proposed the notion of State Archival Fonds, which meant that all archives should be owned by the state.²¹ Under this framework, a centralised archives management system was established in the Soviet Union. The idea was introduced to China after the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 1954, the State Archives Administration of China (SAAC) was established to guide national archives management. In 1956, a State Council Decision stipulated that all archives created before and after the foundation of the PRC by any kind of organisation should be owned by the state and should be managed by state archives, thus establishing the centralised archives management system in China. The Decision also required that the SAAC planned to establish state archives in the capital and in all of the regions of China. Hence, the Central Archives was established in 1959, and a network of state archives all over the country has been formed. By the end of 2019, there were 3,337 state archives in China.²²

Under the centralised archives management system, the archival work is supervised by the Party and the government as well as the archives administration. According to the *Archives Law of China*, if archives that are not owned by the state but are valuable for the state and the society or should be kept confidential are considered to be seriously damaged or unsafe because of the adverse conditions under which they are kept or because of any other reasons, the archives administration can take measures to guarantee their integrity and safety, and when necessary, can purchase or requisition these archives. This stipulation was made to guarantee the safety of those valuable archives, but it also puts the archives not owned by the state in the control of the archives administration. When analysing the development of community-based archiving in Croatia, Gilliland wrote that: 'There are all-encompassing state archives structures that make it difficult for the prevailing ideas about community archives and their potential impact to flourish'.²³ This applies also to mainland China.

The statist archival paradigm

The purpose of archival work in China has changed from the initial centralised management of the archives created by government agencies and the provision of archives for the agencies in 1955 to the current centralised management of the national archives created by agencies and other organisations and the provision of archives for the whole society. However, according to the *Regulations on the Archives Acquisition Scope of Archival Institutions at All Levels*, the archives that are accessioned and preserved by state archives are mainly those created by the Party and government agencies, and in practice, state archives usually give priority to providing service to government agencies, which demonstrates that the statist paradigm is still the dominant paradigm in Chinese archival work.

During the past few years, the state archives in the ethnic minority autonomous regions have initiated projects of centralised custody of ethnic minorities archives in response to the national policy of preserving the cultural heritages of ethnic minorities. Some regulations have been enacted to stress and promote the centralised management. Taking the *Shuishu* archives which are created by the *Shui* minority as an example, the *Regulations on the Implementation of the Rescue and Preservation of Shuishu Archives in Libo County* issued by Libo County Government stipulate that Libo County Archives takes charge of the collection and purchase of *Shuishu* archives, and other organisations or individuals are forbidden to collect or purchase *Shuishu* archives.²⁴ Once the archives are acquired by state archives, they are owned by the state archives, and their management and accessibility are controlled by the state archives. In 2008, the SAAC proposed to construct an archival resources system that covers the archives created by the people. The purpose of this system is to diversify the existing archival resources in state archives, and then provide richer resources for archival service. To respond to the proposal, state archives have accessioned some kinds of archives on people's livelihood (*Minsheng Dangan*) such as marriage archives, veterans' archives, archives on the only child, and archives on the educated urban youth who went working in the countryside in 1950s and 1960s. But the archives on people's livelihood are mainly those created by government agencies or public organisations about members of these communities rather than archives created by members of these communities. Similarly, the management and accessibility of the people's livelihood archives are controlled by the state archives.

Gilliland proposed the VIA (Voice, Identity, Activism) framework that incorporates lessons from community archives projects to define a values-based structure for approaching these endeavours holistically. She argued that a community-based approach to archival practice is characterised by putting at the centre the interests, needs and well-being of a community; respecting and acknowledging that community records and materials are respected and understood in the context of their creation, rather than being approached by mainstream institutions as collectables, 'rescue' or 'salvage' projects, or vehicles for diversifying existing collections; and recognising and honouring community complexity and flux, including changes in interests, epistemologies, demographics and emotions, and their impact on archival practice.²⁵ But under the statist paradigm, the archivists have no awareness of community archives and of the community-based approach. They tend to regard the archives of or about a specific community as a kind of archival resource that can diversify their holdings, and manage these archives on state archives' terms, which creates hurdles for the development of community archives in mainland China.

Although the archival legislative framework, the centralised archives management system and the statist archival paradigm seem not to create spaces for the emergence and development of community archives in mainland China, community archives can be registered as non-governmental museums or social organisations to attain legitimacy. In order to encourage social participation in the preservation and dissemination of cultural heritages, the Chinese government has enacted some regulations to promote the development of non-governmental museums since 2000. For example, Article 4 of the *Regulations on Museums*²⁶ issued by the State Council of China in 2015 stipulates that the state encourages enterprises, public organisations, social organisations and citizens to establish non-governmental museums. It provides the legal basis for the emergence and

development of community-based archives in mainland China. Therefore, most community-based archiving initiatives in mainland China call themselves museums rather than archives. Gilliland and Flinn argued that: ‘in term of collections and activities, traditional profession distinctions between museums, libraries and archives often make little sense in a community-based context’.²⁷ So, whatever the community archives name themselves, they are essentially forms of community-based archiving. In addition, according to the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organisation*²⁸ issued by the State Council of China in 1998 and revised in 2016, the organisations preserving community archives can also be registered as social organisations.

Three models of community archives in mainland China

Based on the author’s ethnographic fieldwork on community archives in mainland China, three models can be identified: a government-sponsored model, an academic-led model and an independent community archives model.

Government-sponsored model

Government-sponsored model means that the archiving and preservation of community archives are conducted by government-sponsored museums or archives, for example, the Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders established by Nanjing Government preserves the archives of/about the victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders; the Guangzhou Migrant Workers Museum established by Guangzhou Government keeps the archives of/about rural migrant workers; and some state archives preserve archives of/about ethnic minorities. The motivations of this model are mainly political or cultural, including for the purposes of promoting national identity and patriotism, social cohesion, or preserving cultural heritage. In the government-sponsored model, the funds of the government museums and state archives come from the government, and the selection and appraisal of archives are mainly decided by professionals in the museums and archives. Therefore, the narratives reflected or constructed by the records preserved in these museums and archives might be the state narratives on the communities rather than the communities’ own narratives. As such, this model might be antithetical to the community-based archiving described in English-language scholarship.

Let’s take the Migrant Workers Museum founded by Guangzhou Municipal Government (abbreviated as GZFWM) as an example. The GZFWM was established in 2011 in response to the proposal of Wang Yang, then Party Secretary of Guangdong Province, that a migrant workers museum should be established to exhibit the development of migrant workers’ life and work, and their contributions to modernisation. As a government-sponsored museum, GZFWM has fixed exhibition rooms, standardised facilities, professional staff, and stable funding. The museum is primarily intended to preserve and exhibit the contributions of migrant workers to the development of Guangdong province and the achievements of the Guangdong government in dealing with the issues of migrant workers including helping migrant workers find jobs, protecting their rights, and helping them to fit in the cities, thus promoting social cohesion. The selection and appraisal of the holdings depend on the professionals of

the museum. Most of the holdings are the records that the government thinks are important to show the achievements of reform and opening. The records documenting the real life that migrant workers live in cities, especially those reflecting the injustices they suffer are rare. For example, You Muchun, a migrant worker in Guangzhou, intended to donate two copies of his written administrative appeal against Guangzhou Government for failing to give him transportation allowance during the Guangzhou Asian Games, but the museum refused to accept the copies.²⁹ Moreover, the tragedy of Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old migrant worker who was beaten to death in 2003 by the staff of a detention house in Guangzhou after being detained for not having a temporary residential permit, has not been told in the museum, although it took place in Guangzhou and many migrant workers think that it should be told. After visiting the Guangzhou Migrant Workers Museum, Ou Chanqun, a female migrant worker who was injured at work, said: 'I want to see some real things in the museum, but I do not see them. . . . Maybe many years later, factories will not need workers to do work, and the children at that time will think the history of migrant workers is beautiful, they will not know the fact that many of us lost their legs and arms in the factories'.³⁰

Academic-led model

Academic-led model refers to community-based archiving led by academics. For example, the historian Su Zhiliang established the Chinese Sex Slavery Victims History Museum to preserve the archives of/about Chinese sex slavery; the distinguished archival professor Feng Huiling initiated the Peking Memory Project to preserve the memory of Beijing city and of the people living in the city. The motivations of these initiatives primarily emanate from the ethics of memory, i.e. the social responsibility of preserving social memory, or seeking social justice.

Let's take the Chinese Sex Slavery Victims History Museum (CSSVHM) and the Peking Memory Project as examples. The motivation of the foundation of the CSSVHM was to preserve the evidence of the existence of the wartime sex slavery established by Japan during World War Two, thus revealing what happened to the victims and seeking social justice for them. The holdings of the museum consist of paper records, material objects, pictures, oral testimonies of survivors and some publications. The majority of the holdings were collected by Professor Su and his team. They have been committed to locating Chinese sex slavery buildings and looking for survivors to save their testimonies since 1991. Some of the holdings were donated by supporters of the initiative in the society. The museum is located in Shanghai Normal University, and has become a component of the university museum, but it has not received financial support from the university. Funding mainly comes from the research funding of Professor Su and his team, the royalties of their books on sex slavery, and donations. The largest donation that the museum has received so far is 10 million RMB coming from the documentary 'Twenty-Two' which documented the daily life of 22 surviving sex slavery victims in China. Professor Su was the advisor for this documentary. After receiving the donation, the museum established a foundation to take charge of the finances of the museum. The museum has been supporting financially the survivors of

sex slavery who live a poor life since 2000, and by 2019, when the author conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the museum, it had given to survivors over 7 million RMB.

There are no full-time employees in the museum. Professor Su is the curator, and two of his PhD candidates are the deputy curators. They recruit student volunteers to arrange the holdings of the museum and work as docents. There are related majors in the university including archival science, and many students are interested in being volunteers in the museum, so the museum has enough manpower.

The memory of sex slavery has become a significant part of the whole memory of fighting against Japanese Invasion in China, and with the highlighting of patriotism education in China, the museum has become one of the bases for patriotism education in Shanghai. It is also a member of the university museums alliance. In 2015 and 2017, the museum and Professor Su participated in advocacy for the archives of/about sex slaves to be included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. When talking about the future of the museum, Professor Su still feels uncertain because he is not sure what will happen to the museum when he retires. He has stated that if the museum could not stay where it is now, he would donate all of the holdings to other related museums such as Nanjing Lijixiang Exhibition Hall, another sex slavery museum in Nanjing, or Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall for the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression.

The Peking Memory Project³¹ was initiated by Professor Feng Huiling at Renmin University in 2013. This project aims to collect, preserve, and represent the local custom, tradition, culture, lifestyle, and memories of people in Beijing. Therefore, it mainly fulfils a purpose of cultural preservation. It is a transdisciplinary project involving academics and students from archival science, computer science, information management, history, and literature at Renmin University. Funding for the project mainly comes from research funding. The project has established 'two websites, one database': two websites include the interactive platform 'My Peking Memory', which is mainly intended to attract the public to participate in the construction of Peking memory, and the special themes website, which preserves the historical culture of Beijing according to special topics; one database refers to the digital resources database that is keeping all of the digital resources. By 18 April 2021, the project had preserved 7 themes of Beijing memory, and the public had uploaded 1041 articles, 8671 pictures and 426 videos to the platform 'My Peking Memory'. Hence, the project has actually established an online community archives, and a variety of technologies including digital humanities technologies have been applied to the construction of the online community archives.

Independent community archives model

Independent community archives model means that community members establish their own archives to preserve their own memory and stories, for example the PiCun Culture and Art Museum of Migrant Labour established by Sun Heng and Xu Duo, two migrant workers in Beijing; the 'Turning Back the Clock' Memorial Hall established by Li Zhijian, an educated urban youth during the Cultural Revolution in Guangdong Foushan. The motivations of this model are similar to those of the academic-led model, that is mainly for the ethics of memory or seeking social justice. The funding of independent community archives comes primarily from donations by supporters in the society. Compared with the other two models, independent community archives face much more challenges:

they do not have stable funding, or professional staff, or good facilities, and they may not attain legitimacy because they cannot meet the requirements for the establishment of non-governmental museums or social organisations. All of these challenges threaten the sustainability of these community archives.

The PiCun Culture and Art Museum of Migrant Labour (PCMML) is an example of an independent community archives. The motivation of the foundation of the PCMML was to record and preserve migrant workers' own culture and history because the community members do not want to be silent or to be represented by others. The founders of the PCMML say that they do not just preserve their past, they also want to fight for their present and their future by preserving and exhibiting what happened to them, just as the slogan posted on the entry gate of the PCMML states: 'Without our culture, there will not be our history; without our history, there will not be our future'. All of the collections in the PCMML are donated by community members. In contrast with the GZFWM, the PCMML accepts nearly everything that can reflect the lives of migrant workers, hence, the materials that are not preserved and exhibited in the GZFWM including all kinds of temporary residential permits, tickets for not bringing or not having a temporary residential permit, and the reports on the tragedy of Sun Zhigang, have been preserved and exhibited in PCMML, thus forming a different narrative from that in the GZFWM. Compared with the happy ending narrative constructed by the GZFWM, the migrant workers' own narrative in the PCMML tends to be a narrative of suffering, primarily showing the injustice and pain that they and their children have suffered and are suffering. Moreover, the founders of the PCMML have realised the importance of empowering their members to record and tell their own stories in their own words. Therefore, they have initiated a series of activities to empower their members including establishing a library for their members to read books, a literary study group to teach their members to write their own stories, and a theatre to perform their own stories. Currently, the PCMML mainly relies on social donations to maintain its operation. There are three staff in charge of the museum, but they are not museum or archives professionals, and there are no professional archivists undertaking appraisal, collection management, cataloguing or other archival tasks.

Discussion

The motivations of establishing community archives in the above-mentioned three models are either for political or cultural purposes, or for the ethics of memory, or for social justice, all of which are supported or encouraged implicitly or explicitly by the state given that they are not inconsistent with the current political, social and cultural development strategies of the state. For instance, the purpose of the Peking Memory Project is in line with the national cultural policy of preserving and disseminating Chinese traditional culture, and with the role played by community archives sponsored by government. It is widely speculated that the idea of establishing the GZFWM to acknowledge the contributions of migrant workers and to show that the government cares about migrant workers was to appease migrant workers and reconcile social conflict because 'mass incidents' among migrant workers including collective activism, individual struggles and labour disputes had exponentially increased in Guangdong. But the narrative that the GZFWM constructs is the state narrative. Although migrant workers participate

in the construction of the narratives by donating some collections, they are not regarded as ‘agents’, that is, they are not empowered to decide what should be preserved and exhibited, and in what ways their memories are represented. This kind of state narrative has been questioned by migrant workers and citizens. In 2012, after visiting the museum, Xiangzi who was a sophomore at Sun Yat-Sen University and was once an undercover worker at Foxconn, a Taiwanese electronics manufacturing company, submitted a request to Guangzhou City Construction Commission for disclosure of information on the development plan of the GZFWM and the collections the museum had collected. He argued that the real life and especially the plight of migrant workers should be exhibited to the society so that the society could really understand the community of migrant workers and care about them, and this should be the value of the museum. The Guangzhou City Construction Commission replied and invited Xiangzi and three other migrant workers to talk with the staff of the museum and six related government agencies. The staff of the museum and government agencies promised to take Xiangzi’s suggestions into account to improve the development of the museum.³² To achieve the goal of reconciling social conflict, the museum needs to negotiate state narrative and migrant workers’ own narrative, otherwise, it will lose its significance.

The emergence and survival of the community-based archives in the latter two models also reflect a relationship of contingent symbiosis³³ between government and community-based archives in mainland China: the government can determine community-based archives’ survival; however, the government also needs community-based archives to implement policies. For example, the state needs to retain its legitimacy, and just as Gore commented:

... in the culturalist view, the current regime’s legitimacy is rooted in the historically shaped patterns of expectation evolving around the idea of ‘benevolent governance’ (*renzheng* in Confucianism) – that the government should be caring, sensitive, and responsive to the needs and wants of the ruled, taking care of them much as parents look after their children. ... the communist regime has retained popular support so far because it has more or less fulfilled its moral obligations.³⁴

Communities such as migrant labourers and sex slaves are vulnerable communities, thenceforth, permitting academics or communities themselves to preserve the communities’ memory for the purpose of social justice (especially CSSVHM which has been financially supporting the survivors) can show the ‘benevolent governance’ of the state.

In addition, the CSSVHM has been viewed by the government to be conducive to the forging of shared national sentiment and national identity, which is one of important policy considerations of the Chinese government. The development of the CSSVHM is influenced by Chinese diplomatic policy with Japan and by the international situation. When Professor Su started to collect the sex slavery archives and founded the archives centre in 1990, he did not get support from the Chinese government because at that time Chinese diplomatic policy with Japan focused on ‘friendship’ between the two countries, and the preservation of sex slavery archives and the construction of a sex slavery narrative might hurt that ‘friendship’. But since the end of 1990s, the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression has been stressed by the Chinese government as part of the larger global ‘anti-fascist’ struggle, and there has been new attention to the atrocities committed by the Japanese during the war. The narrative on Chinese sex slavery has become

a component of the state narrative on the war, and the archives centre was upgraded to be the CSSVHM in 2017 and has been included in the university museum. Becoming one of the bases for patriotism education in Shanghai and participating in pushing the archives of/about sex slaves to be included in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register demonstrate that the CSSVHM has played a significant role in forging shared national sentiment and national identity.

The PCMML has become a public space for migrant workers to communicate with each other, to spend their spare time in meaningful ways, and to acquire knowledge. Therefore, it has also been seen by government as helpful for maintaining social stability although the narrative that it constructs is the community's own narrative which is a narrative of suffering and has not been fully reflected in the state narrative. The museum has been embraced by the society, for example, the PCMML has attracted more than 50,000 visitors since it was established, and its funding mainly comes from donations by supporters in the society. It also has been endorsed by many famous academics, journalists, and some government officials including former Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. At the end of 2016, when the news that the PCMML faced being expelled by the Picun village committee was disseminated on Wechat by the co-founders, several mainstream media reported the news immediately, drawing a lot of attention from other parts of society. Within one day the PCMML received a donation of 71,072.42 RMB, and then under the pressure of public opinion, the village committee announced they would comply with the contract and the PCMML could continue to stay where it was. Therefore, if the PCMML is not permitted to exist, social conflict may arise.

On the other hand, community-based archiving is essentially a discourse about empowerment, and the state tends to feel worried that empowerment discourse might bring about social chaos or public dissatisfaction with the government. Hence, the state usually uses institutional resources such as policies and regulations to control the establishment and development of community archives. According to the *Regulation on Museum* issued by the State Council and the *Guideline on the Foundation of Non-governmental Museum*³⁵ enacted by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, establishing a non-governmental museum in China should be reviewed and approved by the provincial-level administration of cultural heritage, and each museum should meet requirements including fixed site, sufficient funding, and appropriate professionals and managers, which are too high for many community archives to meet. Similarly, according to the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organisation*, the foundation of a social organisation must first be examined and approved by the government agencies in charge before it is registered at the civil affairs bureau at or above county level. Although the government removed the dual management requirement for social organisations in the fields of trade and commerce, science and technology, public welfare and charity work as well as urban and rural community service provision in 2016, the dual management system is still applied to social organisations in other fields. This dual management system creates a hurdle for registration of a social organisation. But the implementation of the institutional resources can be very flexible. If a community archives is required by the government to implement policies, the regulations will not be obstacles to the survival of the community archives, therefore, although the PCMML does not meet the requirements to establish a non-governmental museum, it has not been shut down by the government so far. However, the PCMML needs to be very cautious not to take an

explicitly political stance because it cannot be regarded as a threat to social harmony or opposing the government; otherwise, it would be closed down by state authorities at any time.

Conclusion

Based on ethnographic fieldwork on community archives in mainland China, this article identified three models of community archives in mainland China, and revealed the reasons for the emergence and survival of community-based archives in mainland China. Firstly, the regulations on non-governmental museums and social organisations can provide the legal basis for the emergence and development of community-based archives despite the fact that the archival legislative framework, the centralised archives management system and the dominant statist archival paradigm in mainland China provide little room for their emergence and development. However, these regulations may also be the institutional tools utilised to control and curb the emergence and development of community-based archives by the state. Secondly, the purposes of establishing community-based archives should be consistent with or at least not contradictory to the political, social and cultural development strategies of the state; thirdly, the relationship of contingent symbiosis between government and community-based archives can create spaces for the emergence and survival of community archives. It is important to bear in mind that the Chinese government is not monolithic, that is, there are many levels of government including central government, provincial government, county government, town government and different government agencies that are not always on the same page in relation to the issue of community archives, which might also create spaces for the emergence and survival of community archives.

Community archives have yet to become a concern in mainland China, but Chinese archival studies are facing big challenges: on the one hand, the social recognition of archival studies is not high, and many people do not know about archival studies, thus, it is becoming more and more difficult for archival science to attract students in universities; on the other hand, archival studies have very limited influence on other related disciplines such as sociology and history, and few publications of archival studies have been quoted by these disciplines. Moreover, in the broader discipline of information, library and archival studies, archival studies is assumed to be the weakest compared with information studies and library studies in terms of publications and of research projects funded by the government, which are the major assessment criteria of disciplines in almost all of the universities in mainland China. If archival studies cannot get recognition from other disciplines, nor can get social recognition, it would be hard to sustain. Hence, archival studies need to broaden research fields to cover topics related to the human and social development and make contributions to their development. Community archives is one of the topics. There are many issues that deserve to be delved into for Chinese archival community: for example, how can community archives like those in the latter two models be sustained in Chinese contexts? Currently, the founders of the community archives play key roles in the survival of the community archives because they are influential people and they can get resources to keep the community archives sustainable, but how can these community archives be sustained if the founders step down? And how can community archives like the PCMML construct a community narrative that would not be simply viewed as a counter-official narrative? What can the archival community

do to help with the development of the community archives? Moreover, nowadays there are considerable online communities, then, how can information technologies be applied to the preservation and representation of their records so as to construct a more comprehensive social memory? And how can we facilitate the empowerment, especially the digital empowerment of community members to fulfil their self-representation and to promote the issues that communities care about to become part of the public agenda?

This article mainly focused on community archives in mainland China. Yet, the community archives in mainland China are a component of the world community archives landscape, and this article, therefore, contributes to broader understandings of the emergence and development of community archives for the global archival community.

Notes

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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Professor Su Zhiliang, Professor Feng Huiling, Sun Heng, Xu Duo for their help with the research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China [20BTQ101].

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