

# Research on the construction of genealogical archives management system

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## Abstract:

Genealogical archives possess significant historical and cultural importance. Nevertheless, Chinese genealogical archives suffered significant damage during the Cultural Revolution. In recent years, there has been a gradual resurgence of the Chinese clan culture, with many individuals endeavoring to reconstruct their genealogical records. However, challenges persist in the process of folk genealogical reconstruction, including the informal methods of information collection and reliance on a single source of information, both of which can compromise the reliability of genealogical archives. The aforementioned issues pose challenges for individuals seeking to trace their lineage through genealogical records, thereby impeding the resurgence of clan culture. Hence, it is crucial to implement a systematic management system for genealogical archives, ensuring comprehensive planning and administration to preserve genealogical records and foster the advancement of clan culture. The establishment of a sophisticated management system for genealogical archives can contribute to the creation of a collective societal memory, foster economic development, and bolster the credibility of genealogical records by facilitating cross-verification between official and private repositories. This, in turn, lays a robust groundwork for scholarly investigations in the realms of history and sociology.

**Keywords:** genealogical archives management system, local archives, genealogical archives utilisation.

## 1. Literature Review

### 1.1 Research background

A family tree, as defined by Dr. Xu Jianhua (2002), is a record that documents the lineage of a family based on blood relations and the accomplishments of notable individuals. This practice holds great importance for historical investigations and the preservation of cultural heritage. Since the Cultural Revolution, China's genealogical records have been in a state of ongoing crisis. As Liu Fang (2022) pointed out, the data from successive censuses since 1982 indicate a decreasing trend in the average family size in China. The seventh census revealed that the average population per family in 2020 was 2.62 people, which is 0.48 people lower than in 2010. The decrease in family size has eroded the fundamental principles of traditional clan culture. In the late 1980s, following China's economic reform, family trees began to be re-evaluated as a representation of traditional clan culture. Nevertheless, systematic genealogical archives frequently suffered damage or loss during the Cultural Revolution, leading to missing information and a decrease in their reliability. The obliteration of clan archives and the erosion of cultural underpinnings underscore the necessity for enhanced

management practices and the optimal utilization of genealogical archive data.

### 1.2 Literature Overview

Research on the management system of genealogical archives is relatively limited in Chinese academic circles, with insufficient discussion on the composition of genealogical archives and family management modes. Wang Cangang (2017) categorized genealogy and family history as family condition archives in his study on family archives. He recommended drawing on the practices of private archives management in France and implementing a registration system to oversee valuable private archives nationwide. Despite the abundance of literature on genealogical archives, there is a noticeable dearth of detailed discussions regarding the specific management and storage methods employed for such archives.

In Western academic research, the genealogical archive is predominantly examined within the disciplines of anthropology and genetics. The level of scholarly inquiry in the field of library and information studies is comparatively limited. Nevertheless, certain scholars have elucidated the informative significance of genealogical archives. For instance, Evans, T. (2011) contends that genealogy offers families a sense of identity and challenges numerous

assumptions about history. “This underscores the significance of genealogy archives in identity formation and historical research.”

Regrettably, while numerous scholars acknowledge the informative significance of genealogies, the private ownership of genealogical archives and the lack of discretion in their preservation diminish the value of archives as a source of information. The reliability of genealogical archives hinges on the cross-verification of identical pieces of information from multiple sources. The development of a standardized system for managing genealogical archives, capable of cross-referencing information with other relevant documents, is essential for maximizing the historical and informational significance of genealogical archives. It can also assist families in preserving their family memories and constructing a comprehensive genealogical record.

### 1.3 The value of genealogical archives

Gong Fei (2014) systematically introduced the management mode of genealogical archives in her research. She believed that genealogical archives help enhance the historical and cultural achievements of ordinary people. People can acquire knowledge of history, culture, art, population, economy, folk customs, religion, and other aspects contained in genealogical archives through their utilization. Some scholars believe that genealogical archives also hold value and potential for economic development. For example, Zhang Zhuo from the Land and Resources Administration Bureau of Yongan City, Fujian Province, believes that “the development and utilization of genealogical archives have great social and economic value.” He believes that the development of local clan culture, such as genealogy, can promote the growth of tourism.

### 1.4 The maintenance of genealogical archives management

Xu Hua’an from Nanjing University and Ren Yuhua from Lishui County Archives Bureau share the belief that archives have a crucial role in collecting and managing genealogical records. They argue that archives should offer theoretical guidance and technical support for the preservation and restoration of family genealogies, ensuring the integrity and reliability of such historical records.

### 1.5 The value of genealogical archives

Regarding the specific composition of genealogical archives, Gong Fei (2014) asserts that genealogies typically consist of three main sections: lineage, detailed introductions of family members, and an appendix. The lineage section serves as the family’s household registration file, depicting the blood relationships within the family. The introduction section provides biographical information

and details about the lives of individuals within the family. The appendix documents the family’s assets, such as title deeds and information on estate distribution. Xu Mingmin (2017) quantified genealogical data through the development of a comprehensive big data management platform for genealogy, referred to as “Genealogy data...”. The text provides details regarding the population size and educational achievements across various generations.

Due to inadequate storage practices and deliberate destruction carried out during the Cultural Revolution, the genealogical records of numerous families have become incomplete. It is argued that focusing on the personal experiences and life stories of family members within the context of family lineage should constitute the primary content of genealogical archives.

### 1.6 Summary

Currently, research on genealogical archives is primarily focused on the utilization and preservation of such archives. Many scholars argue that archival institutions should bear the primary responsibility for management. Their efforts should be directed towards assisting “family archivists” who are interested in initiating the collection of genealogical archives to establish a comprehensive collection and management system for genealogical archives. Given the significant amount of missing information in contemporary Chinese genealogical records, which are also held by a diverse range of individuals, family archivists often lack proficiency in information retrieval techniques and safeguarding their genealogical archives. A genealogical archives management system should be established to facilitate collaboration between local archival institutions and families. This collaboration aims to enrich historical research and enhance the local cultural value of genealogical archives. The genealogical archives management system can also help families better protect and utilize their genealogical archives.

## 2. Introduction

There are currently significant challenges in the management of genealogical archives. Firstly, the current situation of the collection indicates that the storage locations are dispersed, and the attribution is ambiguous. Genealogical archives possess distinctive historical significance and hold particular importance for numerous individuals and institutions. Various entities and individuals, such as families, archives, museums, libraries, historical research institutes, and other related units, are involved in the collection of genealogical archives. The responsibility for managing genealogical archives remains ambiguous in contemporary genealogical archive management. The scattered genealogical archives have not been able to fulfill their

role in verifying information for the reconstruction of clan culture and family trees due to the absence of integration and editing of corresponding records. Additionally, the absence of a unified management system for genealogical archives is attributed to the privacy concerns surrounding these archives. Family structure documents are typically retained by family members, whereas family history is archived locally.

In light of the aforementioned issues, I propose an assumption and demonstration of a management system for genealogical archives. This proposal is informed by an examination of the arrangement system of family archives and practical insights gained from the collection of family genealogical archives. The crucial aspect is that every element of the system must be capable of mutually verifying archival information to guarantee its accuracy and fully leverage the value of such information. By sharing information resources, genealogical archive custodians can enhance the completeness of their genealogical collections.

### **3. The composition of genealogical archives**

One fundamental aspect in developing the management system for genealogical archives is to ascertain its composition. Considering the inherent incompleteness of systematic genealogical archives, it is recommended that the existing management system for genealogical archives prioritize the individual as the fundamental unit of the clan. By incorporating personal file data, individual life narratives, and social networks into the genealogical management system, it is possible to reconstruct clan genealogy and family history. Furthermore, genealogical records will exhibit increased information reliability as a result of cross-referencing archival data from various family members.

Personal records generated within the clan system, the examination system, and the local governance system can constitute a fundamental component of the textual content found in genealogical archives. In my view, genealogical archives ought to encompass the following records: a) the professional background of family members, b) the educational background of family members, c) local historical information, d) documentation of family property ownership, and e) details regarding family composition.

### **4. An overview of the genealogical archives management system**

Considering the prevalent issue of incomplete and fragmented Chinese genealogical archives, it is imperative to outline the key objectives for developing a genealogical archives management system. These objectives should

encompass designing the system's overarching framework and establishing a coherent verification mechanism to interlink the various components of the genealogical archives. Initially, it is essential to fully utilize the resources and technical advantages available to the participants involved in managing genealogical archives. Secondly, by employing a scientific system design, it is possible to establish a centralized and unified management structure for genealogical archives. This approach can lead to a reduction in management expenses and enhance the effectiveness of information utilization. The third objective involves the efficient utilization of genealogical archive resources to assist families in establishing a modern genealogical system founded on accessible information sources.

#### **4.1 Integration**

Although the distribution of Chinese genealogical archives is scattered, and there are also many omissions and damages due to historical reasons, the management system should still be centered on the family and lineage relationship. The unified management system can help improve the issue of genealogical records being scattered across different categories of family records and poorly integrated. Each component of genealogical archives should establish a cross-verification relationship with the others and collectively represent family connections. Thus, it is necessary to create a systematic and practical archive management system to integrate the genealogical archives.

#### **4.2 Verification**

Many genealogical archives exist in oral form, and the memories of older family members serve as the primary source of information for creating these records. The reliability of a single source of information diminishes the accuracy and trustworthiness of genealogical information. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a mechanism for verifying and complementing records from private sources with archives and local historical data. Archives and local institutions should offer comprehensive assistance and guide the public to actively cooperate.

#### **4.3 Information Share**

Genealogical archival information sharing should be spearheaded by local archives, with an emphasis on garnering public support and engagement from individuals. The management system, in collaboration with other government agencies, should guarantee that all involved participants can derive benefits from cooperation and share archival information within the system. This practice will lead to a reduction in the costs associated with archival editing and utilization, while also expanding the sources

of archival information available.

### 5. Genealogical Archives Management System Design

The initial phase of designing the genealogical archives management system should focus on several key aspects. Firstly, it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural significance and historical value associated with genealogical archives. Emphasizing the significance of the relevant literature and considering it an integral component in the establishment of social memory. Secondly, the participation of local archives and archivists is essential in the administration of genealogical archives by facilitating the sharing of archival materials and knowledge. Thirdly, following the principle of whole-process control, it is imperative to consider archiving, sorting, and utilizing genealogical archives as integral components of the Genealogical Archives Management System. Hence, it is imperative to enhance the standardization of all operational procedures.

With reference to the aforementioned three principles, local archives, possessing a profound understanding of local

historical conditions, are better suited for coordinating and managing related tasks concerning local genealogical archive materials and technologies. Local governments can also consider establishing special working groups. Considering the self-expansion of bureaucracy and the efficiency of the system, it is not advisable to create a distinct organization for this objective.

#### 5.1 Division of Labour

As illustrated in Figure 1, it is imperative for local archives to assume primary responsibility for the management of genealogical records within their jurisdiction, serving as a conduit and connection among different institutions. In the forefront of archival institutions, voluntary non-governmental organizations, institutions, and individuals play a pivotal role in gathering pertinent data. Non-governmental organizations contribute collected archival resources and general information to archival institutions, which are then further processed and organized by local archival institutions. Local government agencies should provide active assistance when needed.

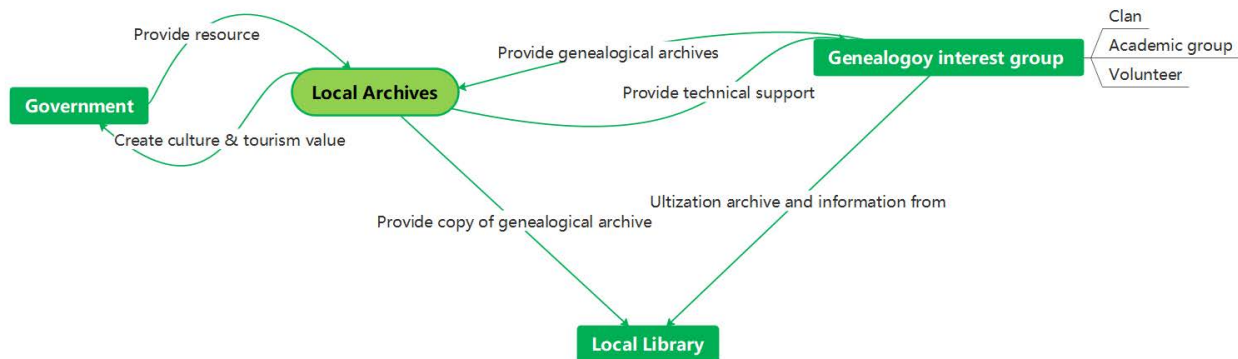


Figure 1 Genealogical records management system structure

#### 5.2 The specific content of the management system

Genealogical archives management system can be categorized into three primary subsystems: collection, utilization, and maintenance (storage). The archival collection system is categorized into civil organizations and govern-

ment entities based on the distinct sources of information utilized for gathering genealogical archives. Given the global trend towards digitization of archives, it is essential to categorize the utilization of genealogy archives into online and offline components. Local archives should offer online access through platforms like WeChat public



accounts and official websites. Additionally, it is essential to establish databases for local genealogy archives to en-

hance the accessibility and transparency of genealogical records.

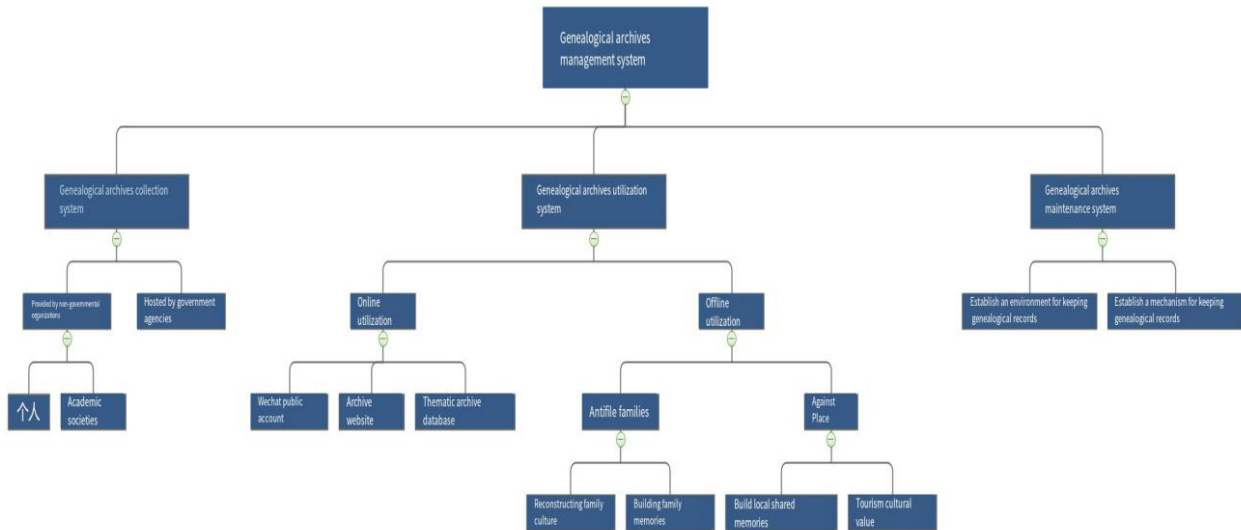


FIG. 2 Specific contents of the management system of genealogical archives

### 5.3 The digitalisation of the genealogical archive management system

With the continuous development of Internet technology, there has been an increase in genealogy archive websites both domestically and internationally. However, the current databases often only focus on regional genealogical data and do not facilitate cross-regional interconnection. We should prepare the electronic genealogical database in advance to truly modernize and digitize the “product of the old era.”

## 6. Summary

First of all, although the genealogical system itself is a legacy from the past, it still reflects our cultural traditions and indicates our origins. With all due respect to historical records and old clan culture, we should reform the original genealogical system and abolish old conventions, such as excluding female members from genealogies. When considering the information literacy of modern users and their archival usage habits, it is essential to embrace new approaches for constructing a digital genealogy platform in the current era. One such approach could be the establishment of online genealogy communities that are backed by archival information.

Given that many Chinese genealogical archives, including supporting materials like local annuals, are still in physical form. They haven’t been digitized, and few books that have been digitized have not been translated into simplified Chinese. Suppose users search for genealogy-related materials in county records at local archives in Chinese provinces. In that case, using traditional Chinese char-

acters will reduce the accuracy of keyword searches and make it more difficult for users to read and comprehend the context of the documents. Hence, it is inconvenient for users to locate and utilize electronic genealogies for reconstruction purposes. The archive system should not only strengthen the collection of genealogical archive information. Still, it should also make copies using copying and microform, and provide lending services for related materials so that the general public, as the main body of genealogical archives providers, can feel convenient.

Furthermore, archival authorities should extensively consult different libraries for access to genealogical archives, like the “Zhejiang Genealogical General Catalogue database” established by the Zhejiang Provincial Library in 2006. Supporting full-text search, titles, surnames, genealogical books, class numbers, and traditional Chinese search can make it more convenient to access genealogical archive information. In addition to enhancing the search and utilization of genealogical archives, local archives can also support the following activities.

### 6.1 Strengthen awareness of genealogical archives

Strengthening the construction of genealogical archives serves not only to revive traditional culture but also as a crucial measure in fostering social awareness of archives. Currently, there is a significant concern among individuals regarding the privacy and preservation of family inheritance within genealogical archives. Due to this circumstance, the genealogical archives have not received adequate protection and utilization, with minimal involvement from archivists. Despite the imperfections in struc-

ture and content of the current genealogical archives, private genealogical holders show reluctance to collaborate with local archives. By promoting awareness of archives and facilitating the sharing of archival resources, archives can become more accessible to users, leading to the socialization and dissemination of genealogical archives.

### 6.2 Adjust the laws and regulations on the ownership of genealogical archives

Centralizing the genealogical archives and determining a specific location for their transfer can significantly impact the current situation characterized by the fragmented and incomplete nature of these archives under various ownerships. The standardized genealogical archive management system streamlines the management process, facilitating users in accessing more comprehensive and dependable genealogical information. Furthermore, the genealogical archive management system has the capacity to offer comprehensive and reliable primary data for historical research.

The methods outlined in this paper exhibit several limitations, leaving room for further investigation and exploration. Currently, there is a lack of established protocols and management strategies for oral archives and other unique mediums within genealogical archives. Secondly, the reciprocal validation process between local and genealogical archives lacks further elaboration.

In summary, through the clarification of genealogical archive content and the establishment of a management framework, the composition and fundamental management procedures of the genealogical archives management system are elucidated. Given the limitations of the current genealogical archives management system and the unique cultural aspects of the Chinese clan, this study aims to

elucidate the specific documents encompassed in genealogical archives and the management approach for sharing and utilizing local archives and personal archives. Finally, it is recommended that local archives and genealogical websites implement database integration to enhance verification and utilization services for genealogical archive information.

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