COLLECTING, ORGANIZING AND USING CHINESE-AMERICAN RESOURCES: AN ARCHIVAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

There are some archival Chinese collections in the United States, such as at Harvard, Stanford, and the Hawaii Chinese History Center, but there is no comprehensive center. It's time for one. Funding could be public and private. The author outlines steps for establishing an archival library.


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INTRODUCTION

Archival materials relating to the Chinese in the United States are available in the following large American libraries and archives: Harvard-Yenching Library, Library of Congress, National Archives, Stanford University's Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace Archives, University of California at Berkeley's Bancroft Library, Princeton University Library, Yale University's Sterling Memorial Library, and University of Washington's East Asia Library.

Such materials are also available in a few historical societies: Chinese Historical Society of America in San Francisco, Fresno County Historical Society in California, Hawaii Chinese History Center in Honolulu, and the Center for Community Studies--New York Chinatown History Project.

The population of Chinese Americans has reached one million; until today, there has been no comprehensive Chinese American Resources Center in the United States. The time is ripe for Chinese Americans to establish one.

Such a center may be sponsored by an academic library, a public library, or a Chinese historical society. The funding sources could come from the sponsoring agency, well-established business and industrial organizations, foundations, donations of private citizens, and endowments and grants of governments.

A comprehensive Chinese American Resources Center may be composed of both library and archival collections. The library collection would include books, periodicals, newspapers, government documents, maps, audio-visual and other materials, which would be acquired, organized, and used according to the methods of library science. The archival collection would include correspondence, manuscripts, memoirs, scrapbooks, immigration and genealogical documents, photographs, oral-
history tapes, records of organizations, and other legal, administrative, and historical records, which would be organized as archives.

Based on the theory and practice of modern archives, this paper will deal with the appraisal, acquisitions, arrangements, description, preservation, reference and outreach of the Chinese-American archival materials.

RATIONALE

An example of the need for the Chinese American Resources Center can be seen in a well-known Chinese American who graduated from one of the top-rated American universities. His achievements in scholarship and contributions to the country had earned wide respect from Chinese Americans and many others. When he passed away, his family considered donating his correspondence, manuscripts, diaries, photographs, publications, and other records to a repository to benefit Chinese-American communities.

Unfortunately, there was no such repository available at that time. His family decided to send all his records and publications to Taiwan, the Republic of China. The proposed repository could preserve the papers of other distinguished Chinese Americans who are willing to donate their personal records to the Chinese communities in the United States. Their personal manuscripts and records might be accepted by the college/university from which they graduated; however, not all schools have such repositories. Even if facilities are available, they have no obligations to accept all alumni's donations. This is why a center needs to be established.

To organize a Chinese American Resources Center, good facilities and manpower will be required. The director must have a master's degree in Library Science from an American Library Association-accredited library school, two or three years of professional
experience, and special training in archives. Additionally, there would be a minimal manpower need of one or two paraprofessional assistants.

APPRAISAL AND ACQUISITIONS

The main purpose of establishing a Chinese American Resources Center is to collect, organize, and preserve valuable materials relating to Chinese Americans, and to serve the needs of researchers, scholars, and the general public.

What are the "valuable" records? The interpretation could vary at each institution. Since the director of the center would be a professional librarian as well as an archivist, he would be able to appraise which records are valuable.

Values of records, according to Maynard J. Brichford's theory, are classified into three categories:

1. Administrative: records produced by governments, institutions, or private organizations that have long-term values, such as for administrative uses (office files-policies, decisions, personnel, and general management), or financial and legal values

2. Research: records that are unique, come from a reliable source, and have meaning and value to researchers and users in the future

3. Archival: the archivist appraises records by costs of processing, preservation, and storage. If records have administrative and research values, but they are too expensive for processing, preserving, and storing, the archivist will not accept these records.²
The manuscripts and records could be acquired by purchase or by gift. Archival collections in many institutions rely heavily on the latter. Except for part of the library collections, archival collections of the Chinese American Resources Center would be acquired solely through donations.

Since a great bulk of records and manuscripts might be presented to the center, the director could face a difficult choice if the center has not provided a collection-development policy. In that case, being an experienced archivist who knows how to judge values of records and manuscripts, the director would establish a policy for Chinese-American archival collections.

Based on the purposes and missions of establishing the Chinese American Resources Center, the following sources could be considered for collecting:

1. Records of individuals and organizations on the growth and development of Chinatowns and Chinese communities in the United States

2. Records and manuscripts of well-known and influential Chinese Americans in arts and sciences, business and industry, engineering, medicine, law, journalism, and education

3. Manuscripts, correspondence, and records of prominent Chinese-American politicians and office-holders

4. Manuscripts, publications and records of distinguished Chinese-American writers, musicians, sculptors, painters, designers, and architects

Many donors will ask the archivist to appraise the donated manuscripts and records for their income-tax reduction. Both for self and donors' protection, it is a wise policy for the archivist to avoid this. Instead, he could suggest that the donors use a library reference book entitled Bookman's Price Index, Vol. 39, edited by Daniel F. McGrath (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1989), to find out the prices and the names of rare-book dealers, or that they write to the secretary of the Manuscript Society to obtain the names of manuscript dealers.  

Once the donated manuscripts and records are appraised as having archival values, the next step is accessioning: (1) to transfer these materials to the repository, including transfer of legal titles and use of restrictions; (2) to make the inventory and issue the accession number; and (3) to write a letter of acknowledgment to the donor.

ARRANGEMENT

American archival systems were affected by European countries in the nineteenth century. In 1839, France established the first, the Archives Nationale. The records were arranged by subject. It did not work well; the system created confusion and disorder. Provenance, or agency of origin, was invented by Max Lehman, who worked at the Privy State Archives at Berlin in 1881, and was widely used as a principle of arrangement.
Another principle of arrangement is to maintain records in the original order created by the agency or office. However, if personal manuscripts are difficult for researchers to use, the archivist must arrange them in good order.6

"Arrangement" is a term often used in archives. It is equivalent to "classification" in library usage, which means "to group or classify materials by subject."

The principle of arrangement for current practice is based on the theory of Oliver Wendell Holmes of the National Archives. He distinguishes the five levels of arrangement in large archival depositories:

1. Depository level: records and manuscripts will be arranged and stored in a special area because of their function or security consideration. For instance, certain materials must be stored in a security storage area; frequently-used materials must be placed near the reading room; and special materials such as movies, tapes, maps, and photographs demand separate places.

2. Record group level: an organization or individual who creates records. In university archives, the records of the office of the president and the office of the vice-president for academic affairs are the record group.

3. Series level: the series is maintained as a unit of record group. It may be arranged by subject, function, or type. If the series is ordered by types, it could include correspondence, minutes, financial documents, legal documents, reports, and so on.

4. Filing unit level: component part in a series. Filing units may be arranged by chronology, type, or topic.
5. Document level: within a filing unit, a document is a single record or manuscript. It may be arranged by chronological or alphabetical order or both.  

Let us suppose that the Chinese American Resources Center acquires the records of the Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA). The arrangement then of five levels of these archival materials should be as follows:

1. Depository: a microfilmed copy of the CALA Newsletters and a second copy of The Journal of Library and Information Science should be placed in the Audio-Visual section and Periodicals section of the Library Collection area.

2. Record group: Chinese American Librarians Association, Records, 1972-1990

3. Series:
   - History and constitution
   - President
   - Vice president/president-elect and chair of program
   - Executive director
   - Treasurer
   - Board of directors
   - Chapter presidents
   - Committees
   - Editor, Journal of Library and Information Science
   - Editor, CALA Newsletter

4. Filing unit:
   - President William W. Wan, 1985-1986
   - President Marjorie Li, 1986-1987
   - President Irene Yeh, 1987-1988
   - President Chang C. Lee, 1988-1989
   - President Peter Young, 1989-1990
5. Document: president's message, correspondence, memoranda, annual reports, and so on.

DESCRIPTION

In libraries, card or computer catalogs are the devices used to find books and other materials. In archives, "finding aids" are the tools. These may be produced in document sheets or in card catalogs. The many kinds of finding aids are grouped into three categories, according to David B. Gracy's identification: (1) for internal control of collections, such as an accession checklist; (2) for in-house reference service, such as a card catalogue; and (3) for external reference, such as a published "Guide."§

After appraisal, the archival materials will be recorded in the accession checklist. An "accession checklist" or "worksheet," "inventory," and "preliminary inventory" should contain the following elements:

1. Accession number
2. Date received.
3. Name of the person who received the materials
4. Name and address of donor
5. Means of acquisition: gift, purchase, or loan
6. Special restriction
7. Types of records: correspondence, financial and legal documents, minutes, reports, clippings, news releases
8. Forms of records: photos, movies, microfilms, tapes
9. Size

10. Housing and location

Since it is created only for internal control of collections, the checklist or worksheet does not fully describe the title and subject content of records and manuscripts. Therefore, it is helpful to establish a card catalog for reference service. The size (three-by-five inch) and form of the card should follow the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* published by the Library of Congress. The data appearing on the card should include:

1. The main entry (title or name) of the record group (provenance)

2. The nature of the record group, such as "Papers, records"; and the size, e.g., "Three boxes, 657 items"

3. Inclusive dates in the title or in the types of records, e.g., "Correspondence 1911-1949"

4. Creator’s occupation or type of activity

5. Physical description, very brief scope-and-content note

6. Housing and location

7. Source of gift: person/family or organization

8. Subject headings

9. Information on literary rights available, i.e., use of restrictions
10. Information on published or unpublished finding aids, such as preliminary inventory and guide, are available in the repository.

11. Accession number

The following is an example of a catalog card from *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, 1963-1964*, (p.165):

MS-64-879

Hitchcock, Romyn, 1851-1923
Papers, 1882-1900. ca. 425 items.
In Cornell University Libraries, Collection of Regional History and University Archives (2174). Chemist and lecturer on the Orient. Correspondence, lecture notes, monographs, government bulletins and other pamphlet material, newspaper clippings, and maps, chiefly concerned with Chinese-American diplomatic relations, spheres of influence, problems of Chinese immigration, including low wages, tong societies, and the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the geography, art, religion, and customs of China and Japan.
Gift, 1961.

If the Chinese American Resources Center acquired the records of the Chinese Americans Librarians Association, based on the above-mentioned form and elements, the catalog card might be produced as the following description:
Chinese American Librarians Association.
7 boxes.
Minutes, reports, and proceedings of the annual conferences and mid-winter meetings; memoranda, annual reports, correspondence, papers, historical and financial documents, membership directories, CALA Newsletter's, journals published by the Association, program books, photos, and memorabilia from the board of directors, presidents, vice-presidents/presidents-elect, executive directors, treasurers, chapter presidents, and chairs of committees.

Unpublished finding aid in the depository.
Information on literary rights available in the repository.
The Center has a copy of microfilmed CALA Newsletter, 1972-1990, at the Audio-Visual section of the Library Collection; and a copy of the Journal of Library and Information Science, 1972-1990, at the Periodicals section.
Gift of the Chinese American Librarians Association.


For the use of external reference, some repositories publish a "Guide" or "Reference List" as finding aids. Others send notices to scholarly journals on current accession information.
The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections is a worldwide circulated reference book. The archivist of the center may send out data sheets yearly of inventories or catalog cards to the Catalog.

PRESERVATION

Archivists and users of archives are concerned with the preservation of archival materials. Archival collections mainly contain organic materials such as paper, cloth, and adhesives. These materials, in addition to the natural aging process, will be deteriorating either from poor environmental conditions or from human negligence or error. Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler clearly indicates that the following factors cause the deterioration of archival materials:

1. Environmental: exposure to sunlight and fluorescent light, high temperature, fluctuating humidity, airborne pollution, and biological agents such as mold, fungi, insects, and rodents

2. Human error:
   a) abuse, which includes careless handling or shelving of fragile materials; destruction by photocopying practices; marking and disfiguring manuscripts; and illegal actions such as mutilation, vandalism and theft
   b) mismanagement, such as inadequate housekeeping, lack of security, lack of disaster planning and preparation (for fire, flooding, earthquake), and inappropriate conservation treatments practiced by untrained staff members.
To reduce the damage or loss of archival materials, the Chinese-American Resources Center should provide a preservation program. Here is a suggested guideline:

1. To reduce the exposure to sunlight, no windows should be installed in the repository. Turn off the light when the storage room is not in use.

2. Since lower temperatures can prolong paper life, and fluctuations in humidity will grow mold, mildew, and fungi, the repository should be air-conditioned at all times. The temperature in the storage area may be kept at sixty-seven degrees Fahrenheit, plus or minus two, and humidity at forty-seven percent, plus or minus two; in the working and reading areas, temperature at seventy degrees, plus or minus five.10

3. It is very important to maintain good housekeeping, and to prohibit drinking, eating, and smoking in the repository.

4. Develop a security system and a disaster plan.

5. Remove all staples, rubber bands, hairs, and so forth on the documents.

6. Place all documents, manuscripts, and records in acid-free folders and boxes.

REFERENCE AND OUTREACH

The ultimate goal of acquiring, arranging, describing, and preserving archival materials is to serve the needs of researchers and users. The main function of archives, much the same as the one of
libraries, is to provide reference services equally available to anyone who needs them. The only difference between archives and libraries exists in the procedure of serving patrons.

Instead of open stacks with unlimited usage of the library collection, the archives uses the closed stack with a tight security system. Regulations and restrictions on use are imposed. Some archival materials are very rare, valuable, unique, or confidential. For these reasons, the archivists have to preserve them carefully and control them tightly so that their physical condition can last much longer; minimize the mutilation, loss, and theft of these documents and records; and protect the privacy of individuals and organizations involved.

People in the United States have "the right to know" as long as they do not invade privacy. Laws such as the Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (amended in 1974) and "Sunshine" Laws in Florida and other states guarantee that everyone has the right to know, except for some information involving the national defense or foreign policy, trade secrets, and personal privacy such as medical files, litigation, financial situation, and so forth. Certainly, individuals' and organizations' right to privacy should be protected.11

If documents received by the depository are placed for use with restrictions, the archivist should enter the restriction information in the finding aids, and write the note on the storage containers to alert the staff members. A written agreement on the terms of restrictions, including prohibiting or limiting quotation and publication, should be signed by both the donor and the archivist. The archivist should strictly enforce the terms. Any violations of restrictions could result in lawsuits.

The security and use procedures for archives vary in each repository. In the reading room of the archival collection, a copy of regulations for use of archival materials should be provided. The use procedures and regulations are recommended as follows:
1. The attendant should present the finding aids to the archival user.

2. The user must fill out the registration form. This should contain such information as name, address, telephone, user's occupation, and nature or topic of research.

3. The attendant should interview the user: both entrance and exit interviews will save the user's time and render better services. The findings of interviews could be used as data for user studies.

4. All archival materials should be used in the reading room only. The stack areas should be closed. A security-alarm system should be installed in the room or building.

5. To discourage stealing and mutilating of documents, the reading room should be supervised.

6. The use of ink pens should be forbidden.

7. Smoking, drinking, and eating should be prohibited.

8. The user should be held responsible for keeping materials in good order.

9. If possible, photocopying service should be done by the staff members.

The outreach, or public program, is of vital importance. Why is the archivist's visibility low? The general public seldom visits archives. Some are not aware of archives existing in their communities. The archivists need to create more publicity and user education. The public
programs for archives may include: (1) sending out news releases on new archival acquisitions; (2) sponsoring workshops or lectures on special holdings of the repository; (3) holding open house for special occasions; and (4) exhibiting archival manuscripts and records. Exhibition, for instance, not only can educate people, but also communicate ideas. It can encourage people to pursue history and to donate valuable historical documents.\footnote{12}

In addition to these public programs, the resources center should solicit the Chinese-American people and organizations for donations, and send a published "Guide" or other finding aid to them and to colleges and universities that have offered curricula on Chinese Americans or Asian Americans.

**SUMMARY**

Although some Chinese-American materials are available at several large universities and historical societies, a comprehensive center is lacking. As the Chinese-American population grows rapidly, it is necessary to establish such a center to preserve the heritage of Chinese Americans and to serve the needs of their communities.

A functional Chinese American Resources Center should be composed of two major divisions: library collection and archival collection.

The archival materials of this center will be appraised, acquired, arranged, described, used, and even promoted in accordance with the theory and practice of modern archives. Acquiring and organizing materials through the archival approach is different from the library approach. First, the archival materials need to be appraised. The next steps are to arrange by provenance or place of origin, to describe by establishing the finding aide, and then to preserve by providing excellent facilities and security system. The final step is to offer reference services
equally available to anyone who needs them. It is suggested that the archivist pay attention to the outreach or public programs such as sending out news releases and sponsoring exhibits.

NOTES


