

The research significance of genealogy from the perspective of archives management: Taking the genealogy of Yu family in Xianning as an example

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Abstract: Genealogies and family trees are special documents that record family lineages, people's deeds, family rules and traditions, and local customs, and have multiple research values in terms of history, culture and society. The current academic research on genealogies mainly focuses on cultural interpretation, clan systems and historical verification. Systematic discussions from the perspective of archival management are relatively scarce, and there are still many deficiencies in collation, preservation, utilization and digital construction. Based on the professional perspective of archival management, this paper takes the genealogy of the Yu family in Xianning as a specific research case to deeply analyze the archival value and practical research significance of genealogies and family trees, sort out the problems existing in their preservation and management and propose corresponding optimization paths, with the aim of providing practical references for the standardized and scientific management of local clan documents.

Keywords: Genealogy; archives management; protection and utilization

1. Introduction

Genealogies, as special documents that record a family's lineage, migration routes, and people's deeds, are not merely the spiritual bond that sustains family bloodline identity, but also the microscopic mirror image that contains individual life history, regional social history, and even national history. Their diverse values have long gone beyond the family category and have become important research materials for disciplines such as history, sociology, and anthropology. For a long time, however, the study of genealogies has mostly focused on the interpretation of their content and the explanation of their cultural significance, while the exploration of their essential attributes as a special kind of "archive", management rules and standardized utilization has been relatively weak [5].

From the perspective of archival management, genealogies have dual attributes of "private documents" and "public archival resources": on the one hand, they are compiled and passed down within the family, with distinct privacy and subjectivity; On the other hand, when it comes into the public eye and becomes a carrier of academic research, social education or cultural inheritance, it also possesses the unique information credential value, historical reference value and cultural preservation value of archival resources. At present, among the genealogies of the Yu family that I have been looking through, there are many urgent problems exposed in the collection, organization, identification, preservation and utilization of the genealogies - such as the fragmentation of information caused by the lack of uniform bibliographic standards (each revision of the genealogy), and the lack of metadata affecting the efficiency of retrieval; The content of the genealogy is overly simplistic (focusing only on the basic information of the eldest son: birth date, marital status, marriage partner, birth status, burial status, and very little other information). In the process of digitizing genealogies and family trees, there are deficiencies in their safeguards and so on. And these issues require interaction between units and departments, not just the simple participation of dedicated individuals within the family [4].

Archival management, as a discipline that studies the orderly management of information resources, provides a systematic framework for the standardized organization, value assessment, and long-term preservation of genealogies and family trees by its core principles such as the "genealogy principle", "source principle", and "identification theory". Incorporating genealogies into the perspective of archival management can not only make up for some limitations in traditional research, but also re-examine their essence as information resources through the perspective of archival science, and explore the entire

process management path from document collection to digital archiving, from value appraisal to development and utilization. The transformation of genealogies from "family memory carriers" to "shared archival resources of society" [7].

Based on the theory and practice of archival management, this paper focuses on the analysis of the archival attributes of genealogies and family trees, and takes the genealogy of the Yu family in Xianning as a specific case to explore the following question: What is the significance of studying genealogies and family trees as a special form of archival resources? What problems are there in the management? What are the solutions in combination with archival management norms? By exploring these issues, we aim to provide theoretical support for the scientific management and in-depth development of genealogies and family trees, and at the same time enrich the research dimensions of archival science in the field of folk document management, so that this precious cultural heritage can realize its due historical value and practical significance in standardized management.

2. The Significance of Studying Genealogies (Taking the Yu family Genealogy of Xianning as an example)

Due to the numerous branches and wide distribution of the Yu family, as well as the core dimension of genealogy research, studying the Yu family genealogy today is not only an inherent need for the family to trace its roots, but also an important measure to explore family culture, improve local archives, and pass on fine family traditions, and the specific significance is reflected in four aspects:

2.1 Trace the roots, sort out the veins, and build up the memory of the roots

The available Yu family genealogies are the post-liberation bound edition (for some branches), the October 2010 edition (Wanshantang), and the 2012 Xianning Yu Family Combined Edition (Chang 'an Hall). When you open the genealogy of the Yu family in Xianning, the first thing you see is the Yu family's ancestral precepts: Respect the ancestors and honor the family, trace back to the source. There are also the family crest and seal of the Yu clan, in which the tree diagram of the origin of Chinese surnames shows that the ancestor of the Yu surname was Ji, later Ji Gong, named Qi, and was the ancestor of the Zhou Dynasty [2][3]. The Xianning Yu family genealogy, as a representative of the folk genealogies in the southern Hubei region, has a history of compilation dating back to the middle of the Ming Dynasty. The existing versions include the revised edition from the Qianlong period of the Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China movable type edition, and the 1998 revised edition (including electronic documents) [1]. In 2012, for a variety of subjective and objective reasons, the Yu family of Xianning made a grand genealogy, which not only presented the reproductive lineage, family rules and social activities of the Yu family's migration from Jiangxi to Xianning, Hubei, but also included the entire Yu family of Xianning in the re-ranking and updated the family's "tree of life".

2.2 Dig into the cultural connotations and pass on the fine family traditions

The Yu family genealogy is rich in family culture, including core contents such as family rules and precepts, deeds of famous people, generation succession, and sacrificial customs. All these are concentrated manifestations of the family's values and spiritual core. The study of the Yu family genealogy aims to dig out the excellent cultural elements, sort out the representative figures of the Yu family who are of high moral character and outstanding achievements, organize their life stories, and play the role of role models; Extract the concepts of self-cultivation, family management, social conduct and academic study from the family rules and precepts, carry forward the fine family traditions of thrift, honesty and kindness, respect for culture and education, patriotism and dedication, and combine the family culture with the new trends of civilization in the new era to achieve the dual values of cultural inheritance and moral education.

2.3 Contribute to the study of local culture and enrich historical materials

As an important part of the local clan archives, the Yu family genealogy, which records family migrations, in-laws, family properties, folk activities, etc., is a vivid historical material of local history, population mobility, social structure, and folk culture, and can supplement the deficiencies of local Chronicles. Especially for the Yu family of Xianning, the migration routes, marital connections with other local surnames, and family business development recorded in their genealogies are of reference value for the study of population mobility and folk integration in the southern Hubei region. At the same

time, they can provide precious first-hand archival materials for research institutions such as the Research Center of Southern Hubei Culture of Hubei University of Science and Technology, and contribute to the study of regional culture [6].

2.4 Standardize genealogical management, prevent clan risks, and promote the healthy development of clan culture

At present, the activities of compiling genealogies among the people are becoming increasingly frequent, but the compilation of some genealogies lacks norms and there are potential problems such as some contents being distorted. Studying the Yu family genealogy can help us understand the norms and standards of genealogical compilation, sort out the deficiencies of existing genealogies, and make the folk genealogical compilation activities more standardized. At the same time, by exploring the positive energy in the genealogy, promoting the integration of Yu clan culture with advanced culture and achieving the inheritance and development of family culture, it also conforms to the relevant normative requirements of Xianning City regarding clan ancestral halls and genealogy management.

3. Some Problems in the current management of genealogies (taking the Xianning Yu Family Genealogy as an example)

In light of the requirements for the authenticity, completeness, standardization and security of archival management, and in light of the actual situation of the revision, preservation and utilization of the Yu family genealogy at present, it is found that there are some problems in the management of the Yu family genealogy that affect the inheritance and utilization of the genealogy, as follows:

3.1 The revision is not very standardized, and the quality of the genealogy varies

First, the compilation style is chaotic and lacks a unified standard. Most of the folk genealogies are organized spontaneously by family members. The compilers lack professional knowledge of archival management. Some Yu genealogies have unclear genealogical records and missing information. Some genealogies only record male members, and information about female members and in-laws is incomplete. There are even errors and omissions in information such as names, birth and death dates, and burial places, which do not meet the requirements of archival authenticity and completeness. The second is that the content of the revision is disorganized and lacks screening and refinement. In the process of compiling some genealogies, there is an excessive emphasis on the glorification of the family, and there is a lack of verification of the records of the family history and the deeds of famous people, with exaggeration and fiction. At the same time, the organization of family rules and cultural customs is not systematic enough, failing to highlight the core of family culture and reducing the archival and cultural value of genealogies. Third, the frequency of revision is not fixed and the updates are not timely. Some branches of the Yu family have problems such as "too long intervals between major revisions and minor revisions that are merely formalities", and information about new additions, deaths, and migrations of family members is not added to the genealogy in a timely manner, resulting in a disconnection between the genealogy and the actual situation of the family and the loss of the timeliness of the archival records.

3.2 Poor storage conditions and heavy damage and loss of genealogies

This is the most prominent problem in the current management of the Yu family genealogy. The first is that the custodian is not clear and the responsibility is not implemented properly. Most Yu family genealogies are kept by individual relatives of the family themselves, lacking specialized institutions and personnel for safekeeping. The second is that the storage conditions are not up to standard and the damage is prominent. Some genealogies were carelessly stored in drawers and storage rooms at home without any protective measures. Most of the Yu family genealogies kept by the people are in paper form and have been exposed to dampness, high temperature, light and insect infestation for a long time, resulting in problems such as yellowing, mold, damage and blurred handwriting. Some old genealogies are even incomplete or lost. Some of the genealogies have been read and lent many times, which has exacerbated the damage. The current digitization rate of the Yu family genealogy is low. Most branches do not digitally scan and back up the genealogy and rely only on paper versions for inheritance. In the event of an accident such as fire, flood or pest, it is very easy to cause permanent damage and loss of the genealogy, which does not meet the requirements of archive security management.

3.3 The utilization channels are narrow, and the archival value of the genealogy has not been fully exploited

First, the scope of utilization is limited and the sharing is poor. The Yu family genealogy is only in the hands of a few people within the family and is only used for activities such as seeking roots and sacrifices within the family. It is rarely used publicly. It is difficult for research institutions and other relatives to consult and study the Yu family genealogy, which makes it difficult to fully exert the historical and cultural value of the genealogy. Second, the utilization methods are limited and there is a lack of in-depth development. At present, the utilization of the Yu family genealogy mostly remains at the level of simple consultation and genealogical sorting. There is insufficient in-depth exploration of the family culture, folk information and historical materials contained in the genealogy, and the maximization of the value of the genealogy archives is not combined with the needs of local cultural research, family ethos construction, etc.

3.4 There is a lack of effective management mechanisms and insufficient professional support

One is the lack of an effective management mechanism. Each branch of the Yu family operates independently, and there is a lack of unified norms and coordination for the compilation, preservation and utilization of genealogies. Genealogical information is not intercommunicated or shared among branches, making it difficult to form a complete genealogical archive system of the Yu family, which is not conducive to overall research and inheritance. The second is the lack of professional talents. The people who compile and keep the genealogies are mostly relatives of the family, lacking professional knowledge in archival management, historical research, and text editing, making it difficult to guarantee the quality of the genealogies and the standardization of their preservation. Third, there is insufficient financial input. Some financial support is needed for private genealogical compilation, genealogical preservation and digital construction, but currently the Yu family mainly relies on voluntary donations from relatives for genealogical compilation and management. The sources of funds are unstable and the investment is insufficient, resulting in low quality of compilation, difficult improvement of preservation conditions and slow progress of digital construction.

4. Ways to Strengthen the Management of Genealogies (Taking the Xianning Yu Family Genealogy as an example)

In view of the current problems existing in the management of the Yu family genealogy, in combination with the core requirements of "authenticity, completeness, standardization, security and usability" in archive management, and in light of the actual branch characteristics of the Yu family, drawing on the experience of archive management in university archives, the following solutions are proposed to promote the standardization, normalization and long-term effectiveness of the management of the Yu family genealogy:

4.1 Standardize the compilation process and improve the quality of the genealogy

1) Establish uniform revision standards. A special working group for the revision of the Yu family genealogy shall be set up, composed of clan descendants with adequate cultural literacy and profound understanding of family history. Cooperation may be conducted with professional scholars from Hubei University of Science and Technology to formulate unified revision standards for the Yu family genealogy, clarifying detailed requirements concerning genealogical recording, information gathering and content screening. Such measures shall guarantee factual authenticity and comprehensive integrity of genealogical records, supplement incomplete entries, and eliminate informational errors, omissions and fictitious contents.

2) Strengthen revision review. A four-level review mechanism covering collection, organization, review and finalization shall be established. Collected clan member information and historical materials shall be strictly verified, and professionals including historical researchers shall be invited to participate in the review process, so as to ensure that the compiled genealogy conforms to historical facts as well as social ethics and public order.

3) Establish a regular update mechanism. The revision cycle of the family tree shall be defined, with the mechanism of annual minor revision and five-year major revision implemented. Special personnel shall be assigned to collect information on family members' new births, deaths and population migration,

which shall be promptly supplemented to the family tree. A feedback mechanism for members of the Yu Clan shall also be established to encourage clan members to voluntarily submit personal and household information, thereby maintaining the consistency between genealogy records and actual family conditions and ensuring the timeliness of genealogy compilation.

4.2 Improve storage conditions to ensure the safety of the genealogy

1) Establish a Yu family genealogy preservation team, appoint a specific person for preservation, sign a preservation responsibility agreement, and specify preservation responsibilities, preservation requirements, and accountability methods; A genealogy preservation ledger should be established to detail the version, quantity, storage location and borrowing status of the genealogy and ensure full traceability.

2) Choose a dry, well-ventilated and light-proof room as the storage place for the family tree, and equip it with protective equipment such as moisture-proof, insect-proof, fire-proof and theft-proof, and regularly inspect and maintain the storage environment; It is required to restore old and damaged genealogies in a timely manner, or invite professional archival restorers to handle them to protect the original appearance of the genealogies to the greatest extent; classify, bind, number and store the paper genealogies properly to avoid damage caused by random flipping or lending.

3) Where conditions permit, establish a digital archive of genealogies, encrypt and back up the digitized archives, store them in a dedicated server, and update and maintain the data regularly; It is necessary to at the same time, keep the original paper genealogies to achieve "paper + digital" dual custody, reduce the risk of archive damage and loss, and enhance the security and convenience of genealogical custody.

4.3 Expand the utilization channels and give full play to the research value of genealogies

1) Formulate management measures for the consultation and borrowing of family trees, clearly define the conditions for consultation, borrowing procedures, and usage requirements, and establish a registration ledger for consultation and borrowing. Appropriate desensitization should be carried out for contents involving the privacy of family members to prevent the risk of privacy leakage; Open access to genealogies, allowing family members, research institutions, cultural departments, etc. to access and study genealogies in accordance with the law, and achieve information sharing of genealogies.

2) Work with research and cultural departments to conduct in-depth studies of genealogies, explore family culture, folk information and historical materials within them, and compile and publish collections of genealogical research and biographies of family celebrities, etc. We shall, in conjunction with family ethos building and ideological and political education, carry out activities such as reciting family precepts and sharing stories of famous people, integrate genealogy culture into the new era of civilization practice, and give full play to the moral education and cultural inheritance role of genealogy; develop genealogical cultural and creative products, build family cultural brands, and enhance the cultural influence of genealogies.

3) Establish a platform for sharing information on genealogies of all branches, integrate genealogical resources of all branches, facilitate the intercommunication and mutual search of genealogical information among branches, facilitate the sorting of the overall family context, and promote the overall research and inheritance of genealogies.

4.4 Standardize management to prevent potential risks

Strictly abide by local regulations on the management of ancestral halls and genealogies, strengthen the review of the compliance of genealogical compilation and the conduct of activities, and prevent the aggregation of clan power, interference with grassroots governance, and promotion of feudal superstition through genealogical compilation; We should under the guidance of the core socialist values, select and refine the excellent cultural elements in the Yu family genealogy, discard feudal dross, promote the integration of clan culture with advanced culture, and create a healthy and civilized family cultural atmosphere.

5. Summary

The study of the Yu family genealogy is an important measure to pass on the family's cultural heritage, supplement local archives, cultivate fine family traditions, and is a concrete practice to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture; Strengthening the management of the Yu family genealogy, standardizing the process of revision, preservation and utilization, and solving the prominent problems in current management is not only an inevitable requirement for ensuring the security of the genealogy archives and giving full play to the value of the genealogy, but also a key to conforming to the management norms of local clan culture and promoting the healthy development of the Yu family culture. In the future, we need to be guided by archives management norms, strengthen responsibility implementation, improve management mechanisms, and enhance professional standards, so that the Yu family genealogy can become an important force for inheriting the family spirit, enriching regional culture, and contributing to the construction of social civilization.

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