

From Comprehensive Archives to Public Archives-the Development Direction of Archives of Universities

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Abstract: The main functions of the archives of universities are serving the basic tasks of universities themselves. But gradually, it is beginning to change with the development of society. There still exists a gap between comprehensive archives and public archives because of many present problems of serving the public. The author wanted to find the ways to transform into public archives by enhancing the functions of social service of archives of universities.

1. Introduction

The archives of various levels have many basic functions and the function of social service is the most important mark of public archives. The public archives have been the focus of the archives academic circle long. Most archives of universities are comprehensive ones. With the development of society, public archives are becoming the direction of archives of universities.

2. The Development of the Basic Function of Comprehensive Archives of Universities

The establishment of archives of universities, first of all, is for purpose of serving the universities themselves and higher education cause. For a long time, the main functions of the archives of universities are serving the five basic tasks of universities, which are talent cultivation, scientific research, social service, cultural inheritance and innovation and international communication and cooperation. Most of the archives of universities are comprehensive archives now. Such archives implement overall management to all categories and all kinds of mediums files in a unified way by six links, that is, collection, sorting, identification, storage, statistics and utilization. From the point of functions of these archives, there are comprehensive summary, information storage and development, supervision and guidance and open utilization.

Firstly, the function of comprehensive summary. The comprehensive archives of universities are the information center of the university. They are in charge of collection, receiving, identification, statistics and storage, including all kinds of files of the activities by teachers and students.

Secondly, the function of information storage and development. The comprehensive archives of universities are in charge of compiling and researching, publishing the files, and mining the archives resources. The quantity, quality and structure of archival resource determine the level of service and the future of the archives. It's an important task for an archives of university to strengthen and improve the system of archival resource.

Thirdly, the function of supervision and guidance. The comprehensive archives of universities are responsible for establishing the rules and regulations of the archival work, conducting inspections and assessments, carrying out the training of archival personnel, improving the level of universities archives management.

Fourthly, the function of open utilization. The utilization is not only the ultimate aim but also the value embodiment of archival work. Before, the archival utilization is serving this university itself on talent cultivation, scientific research, social service, cultural inheritance and innovation and international communication and cooperation. The comprehensive archives of universities must do their best to open and utilize the archives and develop their value and function. Then teachers, students and alumni can access and use the archives.

With the development of society, the original functions of comprehensive archives can no longer satisfy the demands of the people. On entering 21 century, in order to adapt to the reform and development, the National Archives Administration put up the theories of Five-in-one model and Three-system. Both will enhance the function of archival service, especially the function of social service. In 2009, Yang Dongquan said at the national archives work conference that the national archives at all levels should be built into Five-in-one public archives, security base of files, patriotism education base, records utilization centre, government information access center, electronic records center. And the leapfrog development of archives will be achieved.[1] At the meeting, the National Archives Administration declared, "The archives has realized the leap of function from Three-in-one to Four-in-one and even Five-in-one, and has begun to establish Two-system... and has realized the historical process of transformation to public archives." [2] The two systems of archives mentioned by Yang Dongquan are archives resource system covering the needs of the people and archival utilization system for the convenience of the people. Both of them request the archives to enhance the function of social service. At the 2012 national conference of archivists and curators, Yang Dongquan proposed, "The three systems, which are archives resource system covering the needs of the people, archival utilization system for the convenience of the people, and archival safety guarantee system for the security and secrecy of archives, must be further improved and forge ahead with the new goal of establishing archival power." [3] In recent years, the archives at all levels have achieved very good results in serving the economy, society and people's wellbeing. According to the statistics from the National Archives Administration, in 2018 alone, "The archives have opened 101.517 million volumes of archives, with year-on-year growth of 4.57 percent; received 6.594 million users and provided 20.78 million volumes of archives, with year-on-year growth of 0.64 percent & 2.18 percent." [4]

To realize the five basic functions and building the Three-systems is the determination of archival orientation & goal of the functions of social service, and the iconic distinction between a comprehensive archives and a public archives. How to maximally satisfy the utilization needs of the economic and social development and the people is the fundamental mission of archives. That means the archives should view this, providing efficient and high quality service for society, as the starting point and foothold of all work to maximally satisfy the utilization needs of the people.

3. The Background of Public Archives

The words, public archives, was first born in England. Law of Public Archives was passed and the first Public Record Office named by law, the predecessor of the National Archives of Britain, was founded in 1838 in England. During the French Revolution, people regarded the archives storage by the old dynasty as the remaining of feudalism and had them destroyed. Soon people realized that these archives are not only the records of imperial activities but also the faithful records of whole social culture. "It's one of the major achievements of the French Revolution that the value of archives of society was realized." [5]

In September, 1980, the 9th International Archives Conference was held in London, England. China formally attended the conference for the first time as a member state. The main topic of the conference was the utilization of archives, including the public use. On September 22nd, 2000, the 14th International Archives Conference held in Seville Spain put forward view of Recreational Use and which has been the focus of the archives academic circle since then.

Recently, the proposal of the aim of building a system of public cultural service makes new request for the comprehensive archives. Being a social cultural mechanisms, the archives of all levels must satisfy the requirement of economic and social development and play its value. At the 2009 national archives work conference, to build public archives which aim at the Five-in-one function were put forward. At present, some cities in China have taken the lead in public archives, e.g. the New Archives in the Bund in Shanghai, Tianjin Taida Archives, the new Archives of Guangdong Province.

There are three marks of public archives, i. e. directly established by the state government, with the main object of service to the public except to the party and government and economic

construction, obvious diversity and publicity of collection resources.[6] The two main standards of which are whether the service object is a wider public and whether the collection resources and structure fully consider the needs of the public.

The comprehensive archives of universities are established by universities, so they must satisfy the needs of the public in addition to meeting the development of universities themselves. That means public archives is the development direction of archives of universities.

4. The Present Problems with Public Services of Comprehensive Archives of Universities

With the development of economics and society and the improvement of people's living standard, great changes have taken place to people's cognition to the value of archives. People increasingly realize the importance of archives in production and life and have become increasingly demanding of archives cause at the same time. The archival course in universities develops well with the flourishing development of higher education cause these years. The universities have abundant archives resources which will bring wide range of utilization and vast service objects. To build comprehensive archives with university characteristics and powerful function of social service is the important direction of archives of universities by ways of serving the teachers and students better, serving the development of economics and society and people's livelihood better. But the archival resources can not play the function of social service widely and adequately if they were stored on the shelf. People wish the archival department of universities to forge ahead and promote the transformation from comprehensive archives to public archives. But so far, the level of social service of comprehensive archives of universities must be improved. There is still a large distance from the public archives.

4.1 The Problem of Lack of Service Idea

Most comprehensive archives of universities regard teaching, research and management of themselves as the major tasks. They lack of public service idea with the goal of serving the public. These archives cannot getting low in going out of the campus to be close to the masses.

4.2 The Problem of Relatively Backward Facilities

An archives of university must have good archival infrastructure construction to run in good condition which is closely related to the public service of high-quality. Most universities have put huge investment in archival infrastructure construction in recent years and the increase of building & facilities is significant, but in some other universities archives, the repository is simple and crude and the facilities is backward. There are a few comprehensive archives which cannot realize the separation of three chambers. They have no specialized reading chamber and computer, copier or printer exclusively for the users.

4.3 The Problem of the Construction of Archival Resources

The value of archives is embodied in satisfying the requirement. Being one important part of social information resource the archival resource should embody their social value and applicational value. Abundant quantity, high-quality and optimized structure are all basic conditions of public service of archives. The archival resources of some comprehensive archives of universities is single. The main parts of which are on administrative work while the collection of archives of talent cultivation, discipline construction, teaching, research and culture is passively and incompletely. For another, the collection resources of most comprehensive archives of universities are not based on the three systems. They have no archives resource system covering the needs of the people or archival utilization system for the convenience of the people, which will result in the lack of base of public service because the archives cannot meet the social needs and function socially.

4.4 The Problem of Informatization Level

There is a common contradiction that the construction of informatization of the whole university has produced a marked effect while that of archives is seriously delayed as comparing to the former.

The degree of digitalization of the stock and electronization of incremental files is low. And the archiving of electronic documents and the use of electronic records are at primary stage. They are used as directory storage and retrieval so information storage is rarely. In addition, the management and services are too antiquated to meet the requirement of the modern management of archives.

4.5 The Problem of Low Public Utilization

The utilization of archives of comprehensive archives of universities is for the party and government organizations, academic research, compiling history and annals, but the utilization relating to people's ordinary daily life is very low. Over the long term, there's unbalance of utilization of open archives and economic development level, average education attainment, urbanization development level of the comprehensive archives at various levels. In the end of 2015, there were 3322 comprehensive archives at various levels and the number of archival holding is 586,417,000, but the number of open files is 92,663,000. During 2000 to 2015, the utilization ratio of open files of the comprehensive archives at various levels is only 18.26%. This means the open files have not been used effectively.[7]

4.6 The Problem of the Public Service Capability

Unlike the comprehensive archives, the public archives should enhance the public service capability by improving the mode, content and mean of service. Now the public service provided by most comprehensive archives of universities is only confined to certificate of academic degree, diploma and transcripts, etc. The service means are waiting in the office and consulting the files asked for. For the public, the comprehensive archives of universities are out of reach even farther than the archives in the government compound. People will rarely go to the comprehensive archives of universities unless they need the relevant documents.

5. Enhancing the Functions of Social Services of the Public Archives

According to the Suggestions on Strengthening and Improving Archival Work under the New Situation issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in May, 2014, the comprehensive archives at various levels are requested to take it as their major obligation to provide public service of archival resources on overall coordinate two systems between information service of archives and government information service. There are some construction objects, such as comprehensive & one-stop service mode, serving society, resource sharing, convenience and benefit to the people. They are requested to comb and provide people with cultural archives of high utilization value and archives of people's livelihood archives. The growing demand for archival resources of the public should be fully satisfied to facilitate to access and use it. [8] Being one important part of national archival course, the archives of universities should be more active in the national archival course by building the Five-in-one and Three-system. The leaders and archives workers in universities must think seriously of how to improve the level of social service and how to have these problems above resolved.

5.1 Strengthening the Idea of Service

Professor Feng Huiling of Chinese People's University said that the archives should actively shorten the distance with the public to serve the public as well as they can. The future tasks of archives are facing the society and close to the public for the cultural needs of the people, for their own rights and interests and for people's daily life. So they can meet the needs of the public for the use of archives and desire of information sharing will be realized.[9]

The comprehensive archives of universities should define their function orientation according to the requirement of Five-in-one to have closed thinking set changed, keep an open mind and shorten the distance with the public. To have the traditional thinking changed, the largest obstacle is to have the ideas of inclination towards management rather than practical use and strictly controlled changed to open to the public to the limit. To enhance the consciousness of social service and give full play to archival service functions, the idea of keeping files for the party should be correctly

understood and the idea of servicing the party and the people should be set up.

5.2 Promoting the Diversification of Archival Resources.

The functions of public culture service should be enhanced to strengthen the diversification of archival cultural resources. The people's livelihood archives are history record and original document, which are closely related to the public interests and rights, formed directly in the social activities and are most concerned about, most direct, most realistic interests problem reflecting on archives work to common people.[10]The archives resources system covering the masses should be established by comprehensive archives of universities so all kinds of people's livelihood archives will be paid more attentions to collection to meet the contemporary needs of production and living of the masses.

Some comprehensive archives of university with good conditions can try to attract the public to participate in the construction of archives resources. On Historypin of the National Archives of Australia, the users can upload, edit and share old photos and the story behind them. Thus it has become the world's largest platform of history archives and stories of user-generated content. This kind of service not only add the participation sense of the public but also is favorable for archives to collect new picture archive.

5.3 Strengthening the Efforts to Open the Archives.

Wu Baokang, the famous Chinese archivist, said once that the archives must give full play and realized their value by being used for the society and to link with politics, economy, culture, science and education. [11] Meeting the people's need is one of important indexes of reflecting the effect of archival services. According to the statistics of current national records the files which can be opened are up to 90% of all, but the actual average opening rate is only 21. 87% during 1991-2015.[12] The comprehensive archives of universities must exploit potentialities of opening to expand the open archives. We can gradually open those files that do not require confidentiality to have service function and quality improved by strictly following The Law on Guarding State Secrets and Archives Law. The working mechanism of identification can be optimized in two ways of downgrade and declassification and identification before open. So long as being opened and made full use of, the closed files will expand their social influence with vitality and activity.

5.4 Strengthening Cooperation with Other Cultural Institutions

The academia began to study that of the cooperation with other cultural institutions especially the integration of library, archives and museum long ago, and successful attempts appeared in practice, such as Tianjin Taida Library and Archives which implements mode of integrative management of library, information and archives, Joint Construction Project of Zhejiang Yiwu Library and Archives and Comprehensive Exhibition Hall Project of Library, Archives, Museum and Planning Exhibition Hall of Qingdao Development Zone. In practice, the cooperation among the three or even between the two is still limited because of system and mechanism. Some universities have their own library, museum and archives so the cooperation is easier. The integration can start with small cooperation and then expands the field to deep integrated development. For example, the three can integrate books, collections and archives resources of same theme so many materials will stereoscopically show. The exhibition, thematic lecture, etc. jointly hosted facing the public and the teachers and students. And the comprehensive cultural products with university characteristics will be develop.

5.5 Satisfying the Demand of Leisure Cultural Function.

The essay of Relationship between Central and Local Archives and Society by Michael Cook, an English archival scholar, collected into annual report of Records and Archives Management Planning Project co-sponsored by UNESCO and the International Council on Archives Committee 1983 indicated that the whole society should regard the archives as cultural institutions and there is nothing wrong with labeling it cultural entertainment or even entertainment. Like museums and libraries, the archives are different from those pure entertainments. But the three share one thing in

common that people can go to these institutions set up by the society if they are willing when there is nothing to do and carry out in accordance with their personal interest.[13]

With the rapid development of economy and society and the promotion of knowledge and culture of the public, the demand for spiritual life is increasing besides the demand for material life. Recently, the cinemas, museums, libraries and exhibition halls are being built more and more beautifully and gradually they have become new public cultural hot spots attracting residents for leisure and entertainment. Being the important positions of cultural course, the comprehensive archives of universities should learn from the exhibition halls, museums, etc. to strengthen the construction of buildings based on the present basis. The functional regions meeting the needs for people's leisure culture, such as historical cultural zone and exhibition hall for physical archives, can be instituted to supply with better service of casualness, popularization and life-oriented. It's an important direction of transformation and upgrading of archival course to develop new archives for the demands of pastime, thus the effort goal of comprehensive archives of universities to transform themselves into public archive. Those conditional universities can independently set up public archives to build comfortable leisure culture environment for the demands of the public.

5.6 Providing Individualism Services

The starting and standing point of construction of the public service system is meeting the increasing basic cultural demands of the masses. Archival culture is a very important part of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics so it should reflect the status and role in construction of the public culture service system. In 2015, The Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of Modern Public Culture Service System issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council claims that the feedback mechanism of cultural needs of the masses should be founded to understand and grasp the people's cultural needs, and to supply them with directory of menu & order service of public culture.[14] For the public oriented service objects are diversity, they must be classified to improve the service level of archives. Besides service directory, satisfaction survey, resources promotion conference of archival holding, the archives of universities should extended service for the masses even supply them with service of pertinence and individualism. For example, the archives of universities can supply thematic archives of scientific research for the user with interests and needs.

6. Conclusion

For the universities are the highland of thought, knowledge and culture of the whole society, and being one important part of archival cultural course, the comprehensive archives of universities are of great value not only to the universities themselves but also to the whole society. To convert into public archives, the comprehensive archives of universities should try to enhance the function of social service and actively participate in construction of the public service system to improve the quality and level of public service.

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