Personal Archiving and Sharing Personal Memories with Families in a Chinese Context: Early Insights and Implications for Services

Ruohua Han
School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (rhan11@illinois.edu)

1. Background
- Personal archiving: Creation, storage, use, distribution, and preservation of personal materials/objects by individuals. These materials/objects (personal archives) can be expressions of and/or organic parts of personal memories.
- Existing personal archiving research in LIS is centered on how people manage and preserve personal archives.
- Less attention has been paid to:
  A. How activities of sharing/withholding personal memories may be shaped by various aspects of personal archiving behavior and different forms of personal archives, and vice versa
  B. How cultural elements may come into play

2. Research Question & Methods
Research Question
- For Chinese individuals, what are the connections between personal archives/archiving and the sharing/withholding of personal memories in their families?

Methods
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with 32 Chinese participants living in China
- Analyzed data using a general inductive approach (Thomas 2006)

3. Early Insights
Early insights based on analyzing ~50% of interviews:

Functions of Personal Archives in the Sharing/Withholding of Personal Memories

- "Set down" negotiated realities
- "Relinquish degree of control"
- "Visualize/texturize/enliven"
- "Authenticate" to varying degrees

"If you write a diary and leave it there, even if you are writing about something else, what do you do when people look at it and read it differently? When there's ambiguity involved and people can interpret it differently, how on earth can you explain?" — Hai

"I've also shown [my parents] my movie ticket stubs. And their reaction is: 'How could you have so many movie tickets? Meaning why did I have the time to see so many movies?" — Dao

Chinese Cultural "Imprints" on the Sharing/Withholding of Personal Memories (Involving Personal Archives)

- "It's fine for me to just live in [my family's] memories. I am what you see me as in your memories. It's unnecessary to use other 'stuff' to... Those who like me will naturally understand me. Those who don't like me, it doesn't matter what they think. I just let everything be." — Xiaoyan

Principle of Inaction (from Taoism)

- "Bao Xi Bu Bao You" (Share happiness, not concerns)

Ordinariness and "insignificance" of self

- "Because these are all my personal and family materials... In terms of how it relates to a society or a country's affairs... They just seem quite insignificant." — Ping

4. Conclusion & Implications for Services
- Personal archives help people reshape, set down, and communicate personal memories, which can be received by others
- Personal archives can give imagery/texture to and "authenticate" personal memories, but also create risks of losing control over interpretations of memories/identities
- Personal archiving practices of some Chinese individuals could appear to be passive/counterintuitive, with complex reasons that may have a cultural imprint

Implications for Services
- Find a balance between respecting the organic/casual nature of personal archiving and giving advice on maintaining context and preservation (e.g., non-invasive, tiered suggestions)
- Communicate tactfully with users to better understand the nuances of their practices and needs
- Be sensitive to potential cultural differences, develop corresponding personal archiving support strategies

5. References & Acknowledgements
References
- Many thanks to Dr. Lori Kendall for her guidance!
- Image credits: This poster contains images designed by macrovector and vectorpouch from Freepik.com