

The family archives of New Zealand's Chinese immigrant community

by

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Table of Contents

1. Abstract	3
2. Problem Statement	3
3. Literature Review	4
a. The Family Archive	4
b. The Family Archive and Historical Narrative	5
c. The New Zealand Context	6
d. Identity Construction	7
4. Study Objectives	8
5. Research Questions	8
6. Population and Sample	9
7. Methodology	10
a. Data Collection	10
b. Methods of Data Analysis	11
8. Results	11
a. Family Archives and Their Contents	11
b. The Longevity of Family Archives	15
c. Family Archives and a Sense of Identity	17
9. Discussion	19
a. Assumptions	19
b. Limitations	20
b. Significance	20
10. Conclusion	21
11. Appendix	23
12. References	24

1. Abstract

Family archives are unique collections that can be both personally and culturally relevant. However, most past academic research has focused only on the family archives of already prominent individuals and families. Traditionally, such academic research has also excluded minority groups such as immigrant communities. In recent years, there has been a push in archives research to find value in the items, records and stories of family archives of marginalised groups. This research utilised semi-structured interviews of Chinese immigrants in New Zealand to explore the contents, preservation, and sharing of their family archives. It revealed that the archives of Chinese immigrants are relatively young, only one or two generations old due to past poor record-keeping and socio-economic challenges. Despite this, the archives are diverse, often consisting of family records, physical and digital photographs, artwork, jewellery, religious objects, and household items. These items ranged from being those kept in safe spaces and never used, to those used sparingly, to those items that are fully integrated into everyday life and used. They are items that not only connect individuals to their family, but also connect them to their heritage country and culture. These items, along with the stories behind them, are described by the participants as those that are commonplace in the Chinese immigrant community. As such, it appears that these family archives also tell the story not just of the individual, but of a community experience. This places great value on these family archives and their stories as they tell the wider story of a community in New Zealand - a story that is not often shared in the mainstream narrative of New Zealand's history.

2. Problem Statement

The family archive is a unique collection, carefully curated and kept by family units, with the potential to “speak directly to [the] collective sense of self” (Woodham et al, 2017, p. 203). Those who inherit family archives often have a desire “to know how to untangle the stories hiding in those documents, letters, and photos” (Levenick, 2012, p. 3). But family archives not only hold value to the owners of the archive, but also have the potential to speak to wider societal trends and changes.

However, academic interest in family archives has traditionally been limited to those archives curated and preserved by families of political and social interest such as royalty, cultural icons, and politicians (e.g. Grogan 2020, Kostalevsky 2018, Gassmann de Sousa 2017). Recently, some researchers have become interested in the lives of everyday people, specifically with the aim of extrapolating these personal stories to consider wider societal change over time (e.g. Sousa 2017, Miller 2011, Layish 2008). This can be a very fruitful exercise, as the contents of family archives are also valuable as they often hold important historical documents that are not currently being preserved in institutional archives. This is particularly relevant for the histories of small, maligned, and minority groups who are not always represented in historical narratives such as those told in national museums or history

books. These personal stories, then, are “needed to fill in the history of social change” (Rieger, 2013).

Family archives are unique because they are diverse. Definitions of the family archive “usually [refer] to studies of textual, documentary, paper-based archives belonging to specific families” (Woodham et al., 2017, p. 206). This is a “collection of personal items” that a family member or members has deemed significant enough to keep for future generations (Levenick, 2012, p. 8). They are “found in suitcases, boxes, trunks, and drawers tucked away in attics, basements, garages, and even under beds” (Levenick, 2012, p. 2). They are often kept by a family member with no knowledge or experience of archival practice. They also host a variety of different materials. In response to this, there has been a growing interest from New Zealand culture and heritage institutions in helping people preserve their family archives by hosting by hosting clinics and events designed to “provide advice and assistance to those who hold heritage items of significance to all New Zealanders” (e.g. National Library, n.d., Te Papa Tongarewa, n.d). This implies that the New Zealand heritage sector does see value in family archives and, secondly, that New Zealanders see their family archives as important and do wish to preserve them.

This research project considers the curation, preservation, and sharing of family archives belonging to Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand, including how this intersects with the individuals’ sense of identity. It contributes to the wider story of Chinese immigration in New Zealand, shedding a unique light on a growing and important community from their own perspectives.

3. Literature Review

a. The Family Archive

Rosa et al. (2019, p. 14) describes the family archive as “little explored in the works of a historiographic or archival nature”. Therefore, there are many gaps in the existing literature that are ready to be explored. In recent years, academics have become more interested in the value of the family archive, particularly those archives which speak to gaps in historical and cultural narratives.

Traditionally, academics have only been interested in the family archives of already prominent public figures. Grogan (2020) explores the family archives of the Evans family, which included material and correspondence relating to the famous British author George Eliot. Grogan (2020, p. 175) describes the value of this family archive as “[offering] a compelling contribution to our understanding of the author, from an otherwise unavailable point of view.” The same treatment has been undertaken for other cultural icons, such as Kostalevsky (2018)’s work on Tchaikovsky’s family archive. In these cases, the family archive is unique because it allows historians to unlock a personal perspective that may have been previously obscured. In turn, this provides a fresh look on public figures and their creative works.

The family archives of public figures can go beyond mere curiosity and have influence on political perspectives. Ben Enwonwu was a well-known modern artist from Nigeria and held a prominent position in government. His family archive consists of transcripts of press interviews and unpublished drafts of reflections on colonial subjectification and pan-African decolonisation (Gassmann de Sousa, 2017, p. 501). Enwonwu's family archive is unique because it clearly demonstrates the thinking of a political figure during the time of great change in his nation. Better understanding the Enwonwu family archive helps us to better understand Enwonwu's relationship with the British as both a political figure and a successful artist. This personal perspective adds a holistic view to the historical story.

These examples clearly show that there is value in the family archive. Intensely personal, the family archive provides a unique perspective on the family in question. By viewing what items and records that a family has chosen to preserve, researchers are able to gain new and valuable insights about their private and public life.

b. The Family Archive and Historical Narrative

There has also been interest in academics turning towards their own family archives for research. For example, Rosenberg (2011) considers his own family archive with the hope of transforming an archive full of the pain and suffering faced by Jews in World War II into an act of remembrance. These types of research projects are deeply satisfying for the researchers on a personal level, allowing researchers to rediscover and reconnect with their ancestral stories. Rosenberg (2011, p. 90) interviewed communities in Germany who were connected to his ancestors, and even built relationships with other descendants who were interested in "[keeping] the memory of the Jewish citizens alive". Despite being a personal project, Rosenberg (2011) donated his research to the University of Michigan, making it available to the public, showing how stories found in a family archive can be of historical significance to a wider community.

Holtzman (2019) worked on the Dorrit Sim Collection, a family archive held at the Scottish Jewish Archives Centre. Although not working on her own family's collection, Holtzman (2019) reflects the work of Rosenberg (2011) in their mutual goal to "give voice to lives otherwise forgotten." In these two cases, both were concerned with preserving the voice of persecuted Jews in World War II. Unlike Rosenberg's family archive, however, the Dorrit Sim Collection was already being held and preserved by an archival institution. Holtzman (2019) highlights the importance of personal archives being included in these types of public institutions because it allows them to become a part of "historiographical discourse."

But not only can the family archive be used to enhance existing historical narratives, it can also be used to create them. Rieger (2013) is interested in constructing a historical narrative of the small town Trout Creek, Michigan where there is a lack of formal documentation. Rieger (2013) collects photographs and memorabilia from numerous family archives, and

then uses those materials to prompt interviews and discussions with locals. Using this mixed methodology that was centred on archival material, Rieger (2013) successfully constructed a history for a community that was “too small to have benefitted from any “official” chronicle of its past”. This is a demonstration of using an “in-depth investigation of a discrete entity [to] derive knowledge of the wider phenomenon (Gorman and Clayton, 2005, p. 47). Rieger (2013) is also unique because the interviews were not structured, but instead focused on particular archival material.

The family archive then, is characterised by its personal nature. First, that is curated with careful consideration of what is considered important by a family; and second in how each family member interprets and uses the kept material. Even those researchers disconnected from the family archive they are researching cannot deny that it is personal that makes these archives so compelling. As such, the family archive is uniquely suited to explorations of identity construction, with family archives “[speaking] directly to [the] collective sense of self” (Woodham et al, 2017, p. 203).

Woodman et al. (2017) argue that while items held in family archives are often reflective of societal change, the material items that a family or family member chooses to keep says more about their identity as an individual, family, or community. This theme has also been explored by Zhou et al. (2020), who argue that Chinese family archives have unique qualities. Their research into the Chen Yao Family Archives found that sociocultural factors result in Chinese family archives are socially-orientated and often created in collaboration with private and public institutions (Zhou et al., 2020). This collaboration, however, is often reserved for elite families who have captured the interest of well-resourced private institutions. However, these are factors that may be interesting to keep in mind when considering Chinese family archives in New Zealand. Zhou et al. (2020) also make explicit connections between the private and public processes for family archives.

c. The New Zealand Context

Immigrants as a cultural group in New Zealand have also been of interest to researchers. Much of this research has not been connected to family archives, but rather community archives. Krtalic and Grgic (2019) consider the ways in which information has been collected, disseminated and presented to the Croatian community in New Zealand. It highlights the unique ways that different cultural groups access information based on their information needs. Their research also revealed that the community’s interaction with information has changed as the world around them has changed. For example, modern technology has advanced. The population now has more avenues with which to access information such as social media, and people are also more likely to use search engines such as Google to find information themselves (Krtalic and Grgic, 2019, 656). It is not just society that has changed over the years, but also the Croatian community. While the first immigrants had limited English proficiency, the Croatian community today are more likely to be fluent (Krtalic and Grgic, 2019, 656). This means that the information the community needs has

changed and that the ways information is shared can change. It is also an example of how archival materials can reflect changes in a community and its identity over time.

Krtalic (2021) hones in on the family archives of the Croatian community, asking people the content of their personal collections and why the contents are considered valuable. This paper includes many important considerations such as the diversity of content. For example, collections tended to stray from the traditional documents, letters and photographs, and included digital material. Often, this digital material acted as a back-up or replaced original material (Krtalic, 2021, p. 772). However, digital material can also be the original material. Malek (2019) explores the archives of Iranian diaspora in the United States with a particular focus on home movies and digital photographs. Many of these digital collections have been posted online to popular social media websites. Malek (2019) describes each collection as a “site of memory”, as the Iranian diaspora “[articulate] a feeling of in betweenness, of belonging neither here nor there”.

Most often, however, the personal collection of immigrants hold important legal documents such as those needed to prove Croatian origin (Krtalic, 2021, p. 671). These aspects may be representative of other cultural communities in New Zealand such as the Chinese. This is because minority cultural groups often share common characteristics “such as loss of language with generations, lack of suitable information resources about the home country, the declining number of members in cultural clubs, etc” (Krtalic, 2021, p. 666). But these collections are not limited to legal documents and inherited items. Dali (2012) collected empirical evidence on the book collections of immigrants and found that readers used their home book collections to deal with culture shock, share the immigrant experience with others, re-evaluate cultural heritage, and stabilise their identity. In this sense, these personal collections not only helped the readers to maintain a connection to their home countries, but also helped them adapt to their new life.

d. Identity Construction

Central to this research is the concept of identity construction. The theoretical framework used in these research will be the social identity construction lens described by Stets and Burke (2000). Social identity theory posits that “through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorised with the self and are labelled the in-group; persons who differ from the self are categorised as the out-group” (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 225). These concepts are particularly prevalent when considering immigrant communities, who may struggle to remain connected to their home country or feel accepted in the host country. These tensions can result in the “interaction and negotiation” or how the individual chooses to play their perceived “role” (Stets and Burke, 2000, p. 228). Most importantly, social identity theory is primarily concerned with a person’s self-identification and commitment to different communities. This self-identification can be measured using the Motivation for Ethno-cultural Continuity (MEC) scale, which measures an individual’s “long-term acculturation of their group and their dedication to cultural persistence” (Gezentsvey Lamy et

al. 2013, p. 1047). These are aspects that can be linked to family archives, with Woodham et al. (2017) asserting that “we are what we keep.”

Krtalic (2021) begins the exploration of cultural groups, identity construction, and family archives. This is based on a wide range of literature regarding identity construction and immigrant groups. Lok-sun (2012) interviewed Australian-born Chinese people, noting that “Chineseness is still a significant part of their identity—whether they willingly choose to identify with it or it is imposed upon them by others”. In particular, Lok-sun (2012) focuses on the importance of Chinese familial values. The family unit is an important aspect of Chinese culture. Therefore, the family archive of a Chinese family has the potential to hold real value to the family and become an important aspect of the family’s identity as a whole.

Many of these studies (e.g. Rosenberg 2011, Woodman et al. 2017, and Zhou et al., 2020) highlight the potential for more interaction and support from public institutions for private family archives. Firstly, public institutions have the resources and knowledge that family members tasked with personal collections do not. Secondly, public institutions should be taking more of an interest in preserving family archives because the stories that family archives are not often represented in public institutions. By preserving them, we are preserving unheard voices that are deserving of being a part of a national history. This is highlighted by Rosenberg (2011)’s eventual donation of his family archive to the University of Michigan, asserting that family archives are not only important, but in some cases can even find a place in public institutions.

4. Study Objectives

The first study objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the documents and artefacts that make up the family archives of the sample group. This includes developing an understanding of how these documents and artefacts have been curated, are preserved, and shared. The second study objective is to understand how the family archive and a family’s interaction with their family archival contributes to the individual’s identity construction as a member of the immigrant Chinese Community in New Zealand.

5. Research Questions

The following research questions have been chosen to guide the research to explore the family archives of the Chinese immigrant community in New Zealand.

RQ1. What documents and artefacts make up the family archives of Chinese immigrants in New Zealand?

RQ2. How are they preserved and shared?

RQ3. How do they contribute to the identity construction of the individual, family and immigrant Chinese community in New Zealand?

The Chinese community has been chosen due to the researcher's personal connection and interest in it. The community is significant in New Zealand, with the population growing ever since the first Chinese immigrants during the Otago Goldrush. It is common practice in social studies, where "linking the experience of individuals to the larger social process is a common research strategy" (Reiger, 2013). However, the small sample size means that the data is not representative of the entire community. The research intends to aid a better understanding of family archives and a better understanding of the identity of the Chinese community in New Zealand.

6. Population and Sample

In New Zealand, the Chinese population in New Zealand has been rapidly growing since the 1990s, increasing more than seven times from 1986 to 2006, and becoming the second largest ethnicity minority group in New Zealand (Li, 2013, p. 64). In the 2018 census, almost 250,000 people identified as being ethnically Chinese (Statistics New Zealand, 2018).

For the purpose of this research, the term immigrants agrees with the definition as used by Krtalic (2021, p. 664) including not just those of foreign birth who have moved to a new country but also their second and third generation descendants who also "face some of the issues related to multiculturalism." Chinese refers to the ethnic identity as identified by the participants. As the Chinese population is large and diverse, this research topic will focus specifically on those who have historical roots in the Guangdong province. Focusing on this province ensures that the sample group will have some shared history and characteristics.

This project focused primarily on two demographic factors of the participants: their ethnicity and their family's status as immigrants. It was also important for participants to have a feasible connection to both their family's home country and their current country. Because of this, interviewees came from families that were recent immigrants to New Zealand. The majority of immigrants identified as first generation, being the first in their family born or having grown up in New Zealand.

One of the biggest constraints of this research project was the timeframe. It would have been extremely challenging to interview, transcribe, code and analyse data for a large sample size. It was also important to take location and possible COVID-19 restrictions into account. Based on Rowley's (2012, p. 243) guidance for new researchers, I elected to conduct eight interviews. This sample was recruited using my personal connections to the Chinese immigrant community. Recruitment included advertising in community groups and projects including the Asian Law Student Association, the New Zealand China Friendship Society, the Asia Foundation, and the Poon Fah Association.

7. Methodology

a. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. Interviews are useful when the goal of the research is to understand “experiences, opinions, attitudes, values, and processes” and when questionnaires would gather sufficient detail (Rowley, 2021, p. 262). Semi-structured interviews are useful because they ensure that both structure and guidance to the interview, but also allows the interviewee some flexibility (Krtalic and Grgic, 2019, p. 656). Using the semi-structured interview format also allowed me to give the participants an idea of the questions that would be asked beforehand. The questions that interviewees were given can be seen in Appendix 1. This gave interviewees time to consider the questions and their answers. This was helpful for two reasons. Firstly, it helped to mitigate any risk or harm that might occur when asking about personal family narratives. Secondly, it gave interviewees the opportunity to consider their answers. In fact, numerous participants said that they had used the questions to ask their parents about their family collections before the interview.

Each interview took place in a one-on-one environment, both in person and online due to COVID-19 and travel restrictions. Each interviewee was asked to set aside one hour for the interview, although the majority of interviews did not last so long.

Some data about the interview was captured. This included the interviewees’ name, age, home country, and date of the interview. I also captured the interviewees’ role within the family unit. This data point was captured in Woodham et al. (2013) and was useful when considering generational differences and how different roles interacted with the family archive in different ways.

The interviews were then transcribed. Transcription of audio post-interview over field notes was chosen as it allowed me to be more present during the interview stage, thus better allowing me to make the interviewee feel more comfortable and extract valuable information. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety, although personal information will be omitted to protect the interviewee’s privacy. This allowed for the identification of salient themes and “variations in how social phenomena are framed, articulated, and experienced as well as the relationships within and between particular elements of such phenomena” (McLellan et al. 2003, p. 67). In order to ensure anonymity, some personal information such as specific locations and names were redacted from the transcript.

Due to a lack of time and resources, the transcriptions were completed by me. Completing the transcripts myself also gave me more time to familiarise myself with the contents of each interview. In order to ensure that the transcriptions were consistent and captured the same data, I followed the transcription guide seen in Appendix 2. This transcription guide indicates that the preference is an intelligent transcription. This is because micro elements of language such as tone or stuttering are not so much of a concern. It was more important to capture the narrative content.

Each transcript was then sent to the interviewee for approval. Interviewees were able to add, remove, or clarify any statements made in the interview. Feedback in this case was necessary as the typed word does not always include mood markers such as tone or laughter. Additionally, it is incredibly easy to misspeak. This process ensured that the interviewee felt accurately represented by the transcript. Accurate representation was considered a priority as this research was interested in identity construction and thus required a good understanding of the interviewees' perceptions. This proved to be a fruitful exercise, with three participants correcting misspoken statements and choosing to redact information that related to other family members. It also provided the opportunity to ensure that all translations and Chinese transliterations into *jyutping* were correct.

b. Methods of Data Analysis

After being approved by the interviewee, each transcript was coded thematically. This involved using colour-coded highlighting on Microsoft Word and using the comments feature to add any additional notes. This kind of qualitative coding is helpful as it helps to organise and structure the data, make researchers more aware of potential biases, and allows for a more accurate representation of all participants in the sample group (Delve, n.d.).

Thematic coding has also been well-used in studies with similar data and goals (e.g. Krtalic, M. and Grgic, I., 2019, Woodham et al. 2013). Chosen themes often develop as researchers work through the data. For example, in their research, Woodham et al. (2013) identified the four following themes: definition, function, ownership and context. To begin with, I focused on coding the interviews based on the three research questions listed above. This was a deductive coding approach, wherein I approached the data with a preset list of codes. This list was: items in the collection, the preservation of the collection, and identity construction. Based on the advice of Delve (n.d.), I also chose to code text which did not fit into the three categories, but I found particularly unique or interesting. Each was assigned a different highlighted colour and then comments were added when necessary to provide clarification or further commentary.

Each code and its related content was then placed into a separate document, combining the data from all the interviews. The data included both descriptive coding, wherein I summarised the content of the text into one or two all-encompassing words, and In Vivo coding, wherein the code is based on the "participant's own words" and not my personal interpretation (Delve, n.d.). By combining all the data from separate interviews into one document, this helped to help me find trends, similarities, differences, and build an overarching narrative. It also helped to ensure that all interviews were considered with the same level of interest, removing any potential bias of the researcher towards one interviewee or another.

8. Results

a. Family Archives and Their Contents

Described as a “collection of personal items”, the contents of family archives are often incredibly wide-ranging (Levenick, 2012, p. 8). For example, Dali (2012) looked at the collections of books owned by immigrants while Grogan (2020) considered written correspondence. As such, it comes as no surprise that the participants of this study also shared a number of items from various categories. Some of the broad categories that immediately emerged from the interviews include documentation, photographs, jewellery, artwork, religious objects, and other household objects.

Photographs were the most popular object to discuss, brought up by 100% of participants. The photographs were some of the older items in family collections, crossing multiple generations. They were also an item that many participants felt sentimental about. In particular, when the photograph included family members and friends, although less so when the photograph depicted scenery or other imagery. The importance of family photographs was highlighted a number of times by participants, with many of them reflecting on childhood memories wherein the family would gather to discuss them. One participant remembered “a really lovely evening” with her parents and grandparents and talking about some photographs, the transparencies of which were projected against a wall. These types of gatherings seemed very commonplace and were also experiences that participants said that they would wish to recreate with future generations.

Most photographs were housed in the sleeves of photograph albums, and the albums were placed in various areas around the house such as in closets or under beds. One participant even remarked that the space was “not very safe.” Which photographs went into which albums and in what order was a decision often made by someone who was the interviewee, though some common observations were made. The photograph albums tended to include photographs of a similar time or theme. For example, one photograph album was dedicated to the career of a participant’s father, showing the man in training and in uniform.

Some photographs were also digital, though this was considerably less common. One participant in particular spoke at length about digital photographs. These photographs were particularly special because the participant had digitised physical photographs and personally edited them. In the case of photographs that had been digitised, the original copies had also been kept. No participants spoke about any born-digital material.

Jewellery was also a popular topic and was mentioned by 85% of participants. In particular, participants spoke of gold or gold-plated jewellery and jade. Gold and jade jewellery are both popular in Chinese culture, with gold jewellery synonymous with weddings and jade a symbol of beauty and preciousness. Its popularity, however, is long-lasting, with China’s market for gold jewellery soaring by over 450% for a few years leading up to 2013 (24/7 Wall St, 2018). One participant referenced the Chinese fascination with jewellery, suggesting that in the past, where socio-economics was more turbulent in China, jewellery acted as a practical investment, saying, “Money was really unreliable... A gold necklace could always buy you something.”

Jewellery was also the only category in which participants referenced being personally gifted the item. Participants talked about receiving jewellery as a child from older relatives and family friends. As such, it was also one of the few items that multiple participants felt a sense of ownership over. Despite this, a few participants suggested that the jewellery was not necessarily important to them. Rather, it was important to them because it represented a cultural tradition and was a gift, but it did not hold much sentimental value. One participant said, “They’re obviously important, but they don’t have any sentimental value because I never wear them, and they didn’t belong to anyone else.”

Jewellery also seemed to fall into two distinct camps: the jewellery that is worn everyday, and the jewellery that is never worn. The jewellery mentioned above that was gifted to participants as children tended to fall into the latter category. However, many participants spoke about jewellery worn by older generations. One participant in particular spoke about a gold necklace that had been worn everyday by her grandmother, and has now been passed onto her. Other participants spoke of older women in the family, many of whom have a jade bracelet that is worn every day. These bracelets, however, seem to be attached to the individual, and those who said that they would consider wearing a jade bracelet also said that they would acquire their own.

Family papers are common in a family archive, but did not come up frequently in the interviews. Documentation such as passports, education certificates, and birth certificates were mentioned by three of the participants. One participant suggested that her family had less documentation than others due to her parents growing up in an era when official record keeping was poor in China. Additionally, her family gave up Chinese citizenship when coming to New Zealand. Documentation was mostly kept by parents in a cabinet or separate folder. Participants did not speak at length about family papers, and did not seem to ascribe stories or much value to them. Despite this, when brought up by the interviewer, the participants did suggest that there were papers of their own that they would one day add to the family collection. One participant, discussing her graduation certificates, said, “I assume [it] wouldn’t be thrown out.” These documents, it seems, have a primarily practical place in the family archive.

However, one participant did have a unique set of family papers. A family member had compiled a set of documents about one sect of the family, including clippings, photographs and other documentation. This collection of family papers about her ancestors seemed to hold more sentimental value than those practical papers of current family members. These papers also seemed to hold more story-telling potential, the interviewer suggesting that she would like to properly go through them and discuss them with other family members.

Two participants discussed pieces of art. Both were paintings that were hung in the home that both participants recalled as being items that had simply always been there. They were items that immediately prompted in depth description, with both participants immediately describing the style and subject of the paintings with great fondness. They were also items

that had great value to the participants. This was highlighted with both participants saying that the paintings were items that they would like to keep and hang in their future homes.

One participant discussed various religious objects including statues of Buddha and incense. Like the artworks, these were objects that the participant strongly associated with her family home. The participant described it as a multi-sensory experience, walking into the family home and seeing the Buddha and then, at night, smelling the incense when her grandparents would light it. She also spoke of offering food and gifts to the Buddha. Every home in the family had a large Buddha statue at the entrance. Despite not being a religious person herself, the interviewee suggested that this was important to her because she knew it was incredibly important to her grandparents. So much so that she would, in the future, feel an “obligation” to preserve at least one of the Buddha statues. This sense of obligation may be due to a sense of filial piety, as explored by Lok-sun (2012).

Multiple participants referred to household objects that were used in their family’s everyday lives. Such items typically included Chinese-style wooden furniture, but also included items such as calligraphy brushes and combs. These were also items that the participants typically said that they would like to keep and place in their own homes in the future. For one participant, this was not just because she saw great monetary value in the furniture pieces, but also because the furniture had been specially commissioned by her father. Some of these practical household items, such as the comb, were also leaving gifts that had been given to the family by other family members. Because of this, they had great sentimental value to the family.

It was also interesting to consider where items in the family archive are stored, although this was not a factor considered by previous research of a similar nature. Interviewing immigrant families meant that there was a high likelihood that the family was divided across nations. This was reflected in the interviews, with three participants talking about aspects of their collections which were divided across different family homes. These family homes often crossed generations and even international waters. Despite this, these collections are still considered one whole and are even still accessible to all family members.

But many participants also went beyond the objects of their family collections. In addition to the objects, some participants also chose to speak about the language, stories, and traditions that they hold dear and consider part of their family collection. This was an unexpected result, as previous studies focused on the physical. One participant spoke about how her family speaks both Cantonese and English in the home, and how other Chinese dialects that her ancestors would have spoken have been lost. She was passionate about wanting to pass these language skills on to any future descendants. When asked what she would like to pass down to her descendants, one participant responded, “What’s more important to me to pass down is what I’ve achieved in my life... I want to leave behind positive things that I have achieved in my career or what I’ve done in my lifetime.” These ideas are far more conceptual, suggesting that the contents of the family archives go far beyond what previous studies (e.g. Kostalevsky, 2018 and Gassmann de Sousa, 2017) looked considered.

Other participants spoke of different traditions such as cleaning an umbilical cord with cloth at birth, giving a baby a jade bracelet to be taken off as they grow too large for it, or sitting the month as a new mother. One participant spoke about a poem that had been in the family for nineteen generations which was referred to in order to choose the middle name shared by each person in each generation - a special tradition unique to her family. Each of these traditions is completely unique, driven by cultural norms and family traditions, and participants were contemplative when asked if they would continue these traditions when starting their own families. Some traditions, according to participants, felt too “old-fashioned” to be continued. Others, however, like the naming tradition, felt very personal and special to the family and would be continued.

The contents of family archives of the Chinese immigrant community in New Zealand are undoubtedly incredibly diverse. They are held by different members of the family in different locations, are of various formats, are used every day or kept sacred, and are undoubtedly important to those families who own them.

b. The Longevity of Family Archives

The contents of the family archive also need to be preserved for future generations and, in some cases, are actively shared amongst the family. Preservation can take many forms such as storing an item safely, monitoring its use, or even making another copy of it. Similarly, archives can be shared in different ways. This can include physical access to an item, recording notes on items such as photographs for future viewers, or passing down information informally such as in conversation.

Each participant was asked about their family photograph collections. These were collections that did, in particular, bring up lively conversation about the preservation and sharing of family collections. To begin with, the preservation of family photographs began with their storage. Typically, the photograph collections were already safely kept in the plastic pockets of photograph albums and did seem to have some kind of order, either organised by theme or time. The albums themselves were more haphazardly placed, though still easily found. This typically included places such as the under the bed, in wardrobes, or in the garage.

But above all, the family photograph collections show that the family archive is undoubtedly a place of sharing and connection. All participants spoke about discussing various items and records with other family members. Many of the items had no written record or accompanying note (e.g. inscriptions on photographs), so the stories were passed down orally. Admittedly, some of this conversation with family was prompted by this research, with participants speaking to older family members about the collections and their items when receiving the list of questions before the interview. Some participants even suggested that they wished to speak more with their parents about various items after the interview.

However, some discussion did occur without this research as a prompt. One participant spoke about the entire family returning to one home every year for Chinese New Year, and how each year there would be discussion about the individual and family portraits hung around the home. Two participants spoke about going through family photograph albums to choose photographs to give (in alternative forms, e.g. video presentation or an enhanced copy) to others on milestone birthdays.

For most other items, the primary form of preservation was limiting use and storing it well. For example, in the case of the comb, the owner did not allow her daughter to take the comb away from the family home for fear of losing it. The Buddha statues were interacted with in the evening when replacing incense or making offerings, but otherwise the area surrounding the statue was treated with care. They could not be played with and children knew not to run in the area. Unworn jewellery was kept in separate pouches so that chains did not tangle. In terms of photographs, one participant insisted that, "They aren't in the sun and perishing." This shows that while participants might not have described these actions as forms of preventative preservation, they were concerned with caring for them and unknowingly took on similar values.

Many participants, however, suggested that the preservation of their family archives was not something that they had considered before. This was particularly the case for items in the collection that were used or, at least, remained present in everyday life. For example, jewellery that was worn was described as "hardy" and not needing any preservative measures. Items such as furniture were used and subject to everyday wear and tear without concern. However, it is almost important to note that participants did not take ownership for items in the family collection. Therefore, it is possible that participants were simply unaware of upkeep or care undertaken by their parents.

Only one participant spoke about actively preserving part of his family collection. Although, it is important to note that he did not necessarily describe or view it as preservation. He had the time to digitise some photographs and a VHS video. But beyond simply scanning the photographs and storing them on his computer, the participant had also taken the time to learn how to edit photographs. This was a new skill that he acquired specifically for this task. He edited the photographs because the photographs were damaged, either discoloured or torn. Not all the photographs in the family collection were digitised, but he did suggest that he planned to continue with his personal project. These photographs were also part of the collection that he took full ownership of, perhaps adding to his willingness to take such initiative.

When asked about preservation in the future, participants were open to the idea but largely felt they did not have the necessary information or skills at this point in time. They also acknowledged that undertaking tasks such as digitising photographs would require resources that they simply did not have. Even keeping certain objects (e.g. the Buddha statues) would require a large amount of space, let alone then having the time and the money to care for them. Two participants did suggest a solution to this problem - being selective about the

objects that received any kind of preservation treatment. One participant suggested that she might go through some old photographs and select photographs with sentimental value. The participant whose collection included the Buddha statues said that she might consider keeping just one.

So, it does appear that people are interested in preserving at least part of their family collections, but they simply do not know where to start. The issue of ownership could also contribute to this trend. Although participants said that they did not believe their parents (the usual owners of the collections) would mind if they wanted to, for example, digitise the family photographs, they did still feel as though they would have to ask. As such, despite being interested in the idea of preservation during the interview, it is understandable that few had thought about it before.

c. Family Archives and a Sense of Identity

Family archives, carefully curated and shared, have the opportunity to “speak directly to [the] collective sense of self” (Woodham et al, 2017, p. 203). When discussing their family collections, all participants were asked three questions: do you feel connected to your heritage country?; is your family collection important to you?; and does your family collection tell your family’s story? These questions were designed to try and determine to what extent the family archive contributed to each individual’s sense of identity as a Chinese immigrant in New Zealand.

Firstly, it is important to note that all participants said that they do feel a connection to their heritage country. Many also explicitly called themselves Chinese. This is an act of claiming. Claiming is an aspect of identity construction in which the individual deliberately “negotiate[s] with themselves and with others to enhance their identities” (Roberts and Creary, 2011, p. 77). This connection, according to participants, was due to having family still in China, having memories in China, or adhering to Chinese values. However, all participants also felt a connection to New Zealand. This was largely due to growing up in New Zealand. Some participants supplemented this by saying that they did not necessarily feel fully Chinese. For example, when asked how he feels when he visits China, one participant said, “I definitely felt ABC. Well, not American. And I was made to feel that way as well because I did have the accent and I did dress differently. I was also tall and bigger than everyone else. I had different ideas and stuff like that.”

Beginning at a smaller scale, there was evidence that various items in the collections did make participants feel connected to their family. For example, when discussing the Buddha statues, the participant said, “The idea of the Buddha is part of the family collection that is important to my grandparents and therefore important to me.” Participants were also very excited to identify different people in photographs. One participant said, “When I was a kid and we had to do those family tree assignments... it was one of my favourite things to do. I got to see what my great-grandma looked like. I got to understand where she came from.”

But the sense of family very quickly overlapped with a sense of cultural belonging. One participant in particular spoke about how she had always wanted a jade bracelet of her own as a child. When asked why, she said that she had spent a lot of time with her aunties who all wore jade bracelets and she “just wanted to be part of who they were.” While she may have been more directly referring to her family, several participants reflected on jade jewellery of this kind being characteristically Chinese. Therefore, it is possible that being “part of who they were” referred to a wider community than simply family.

Photographs and video were also examples of material that helped participants learn more about and connect with their cultural history. When discussing the video, the participant said, “It’s a glimpse into how they lived and what they did in the 1990s. This is really cool... This whole community comes together to do a giant cook off with the whole village.” One participant spoke about her ancestor who had had her feet bound. She said, “That’s an insane era to grow up in. I can’t even fathom what they went through. It’s so different from my own life. That was the best part [of going through the photographs] - putting a face to all these stories and knowing who these people are and how they are connected to me.”

Some items were also particularly sentimental in this sense. Many participants said that their family did not come to New Zealand with many possessions. Many of the families were not well-off and had come to New Zealand to make a better life. One participant said of their family collection, “Those items were always important to our family members. I’m not sure what it meant for my parents. But for me, it meant all the hard work - all the savings that they put in to give me something.” These items are not just representative of a culture, they are representative of a community who worked extremely hard to make a better life for their future generations. And this sentiment was echoed throughout a number of interviews, with another participant saying, “Just memories and evidence like that makes me think about how lucky we are today... I mean, it wasn’t exactly the easiest way of life back then because, obviously, they were going through civil war with Hong Kong and Guangzhou. They were trying to escape. But they were still happy because they had each other... It was really eye opening to see that no matter what was going on around them, they were still happy.”

The inclusion of language and traditions also seemed important to participants’ sense of identity. On language, the participant said, “It’s really how I feel connected to my heritage. It really validates my own identity about it.” As such, it seems that this is a deliberate act in order to achieve what Roberts and Creary (2012, p. 77) call “social validation”. The traditions and values also seem like a way to stay connected to the culture .

The MEC scale suggests some criteria for identity construction in an ethno-cultural community. Some of these include the practice of traditions, maintaining heritage and language, and creating an environment where heritage can thrive (Gezentsvey Lamy et al. 2013, p. 1051). With this in mind, the participants score very highly, suggesting that they do construct their identities as Chinese. Participants did want to continue certain traditions and were interested in cultural aspects of their collections - both the items and the stories behind them.

Additionally, when asked if national institutions such as Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand would find value in their family collections, many people had the same response. It was that perhaps there would be interest because they were items and stories typical of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand, but also that because of that they would likely be able to find similar items and stories elsewhere. Because of this, many participants found it difficult to imagine that such institutions would be interested in the contents of their personal family collections. However, calling items and stories “typical” does suggest that the participants did feel part of a wider community. And, perhaps, that their family archives do help to connect them to that community.

During this line of questioning, there was a sense of this community identifying as the ‘other’. One participant spoke about how she did not feel represented at such institutions. Another spoke of deliberately seeking out information from such institutions about his community. And despite participants being hesitant to say that such institutions might find value in their family collections, all participants who were asked did say that they would be interested in viewing other family collections from their community if they were on display. This line of questions perhaps speaks more to the ‘immigrant’ aspect of the identity, which many interviewees did suggest as distinctly different from simply Chinese.

Clearly, participants felt a deep sense of connection to their culture that was enhanced by various aspects of their family collections. This connected them both to their family and to a wider culture and community. For the most part, it appeared that these collections and the stories connected the participants to their Chinese heritage, and did not necessarily speak to their lives as immigrants in New Zealand. However, there was still acknowledgement that these collections of predominantly Chinese items had been brought to New Zealand to share in the families’ new lives. These collections would soon collect more New Zealand items such as new photographs of recent times. And while perhaps each individual looking at their family collection did not necessarily view it in that way, it was clear that as a collective they did tell a story unique to the immigrant community.

9. Discussion

a. Assumptions

There were a number of assumptions made prior to undertaking the research that likely influenced the interviews and thus the results. Firstly, it was assumed that all families have some kind of family collection and, secondly, that the collection is important to them. This latter assumption in particular was borne of previous literature.

It was also assumed that the participants would feel some kind of connection to their heritage country. And while this did show in the data, it is possible that this assumption was only realised because participants were recruited from social groups which celebrate Chinese culture and connect Chinese people. This recruitment tactic was practical given the short

timeframe, but may have biased the data. It would be interesting to see if people who do not take such obvious interest in their heritage have similar family collections and, if so, if those collections connect them to their family's history.

Based on previous research (e.g. Rieger 2013), it was also assumed that the research data would form some kind of narrative. This informed the methodology. Without the assumption of an emerging narrative or, at least, trends and similarities, coding data qualitatively by theme may not have been the best approach. There were, of course, differences in responses and participants with unique outlooks for certain questions, but there were many similarities. As such, themes and narratives did emerge. However, with more diversity and a larger sample size, this may have been more challenging.

b. Limitations

One of the immediate issues in the research was that of vocabulary. The advertisements and information paperwork for the participants referred to a "family archive". While the intent of the research was simply to discuss items that have been deliberately kept in families (thus creating some kind of collection), the use of the word 'archive' immediately caused hesitation in participants. Many participants expressed nervousness beforehand, saying that they would have nothing to talk about. Short discussion and the provision of questions beforehand helped to ease confusion, but hesitancy did continue throughout the interviews, with participants frequently asking for confirmation about whether or not certain items or concepts "counted" as part of a family collection.

The sample population was not very diverse. It was most important to approach people of the same ethnic background, so no effort was made to diversify other demographic factors that academic studies often consider such as age or gender. However, there was an obvious skew in these factors that cannot be ignored. For example, 85% of the participants identified as female, and all participants were in their 20s. This small age range also meant that participants tended to hold similar roles in the family. As such, participants did not necessarily consider themselves as owners or responsible parties for the family collection.

It would be interesting to interview a more diverse range of people. In particular, it might be fruitful to interview people who have already inherited a collection and thus feel responsible for it and may also be considering how to pass on the collection to their descendants. Some participants also referred to grandparents who seemed to be responsible for creating the collections - with the majority of the collections only going back one or two generations. Interviewing the creator of a collection would provide valuable insight.

The sample size for this research was also extremely small due to time and resource constraints. This, and the lack of demographic diversity, makes it difficult to suggest that the results are representative of the entire Chinese immigrant community in New Zealand despite the similarities and trends that did emerge.

c. Significance

Previous research in the field has focused primarily on the archives of the public figures (e.g. Grogan 2020, and Kostolevsky 2018) and the reconstruction of historical narratives (Rosenberg 2011, and Rieger 2013). There has also been a recent focus on immigrant communities in terms of their information seeking behaviours (e.g. Krtalic 2021) and collecting behaviours (Dali 2012). However, there has not been significant work done on how some of these research questions and methodologies can be combined. This study, however, combined the interest in archival content with the idea of identity construction and, incidentally, the creation of a historical narrative. It adds to the literature that is increasingly finding value in the stories behind everyday peoples' family archives.

The methodology could be replicated for other groups of interest. Future research could not only revisit the Chinese immigrant community in New Zealand with a more diverse sample size, but could also consider different communities with similar historical contexts. This future research could consider a variety of research perspectives, including constructing historical narratives of those not represented in national histories and could further expand on various concepts of identity including the individual, the family, and the community.

Similar research may also be of interest to collecting institutions. Multiple participants spoke of not feeling represented or valued by such institutions. Such research may increase institutions' perception of the family collections and shed a light on what research and exhibitions would be of interest to under-represented groups. As mentioned above, many institutions are also already offering advice to those who wish to preserve family collections. This research clearly showed that there is an interest, but lack of knowledge and resources. Further research may be helpful to build better connections and better understand how to help those planning on undertaking preservation efforts.

10. Conclusion

Family archives are unique collections which provide insights into family stories and, by extension, the stories of communities. These collections can comprise a variety of items, records, and even concepts. Some items and stories in these collections are preserved, even though this is often done without conscious effort. Still, some measures such as small scale digitisation, limited use, and appropriate storage are in place.

When asked about the perceived value of their family collections, many participants claimed that their collections might not have value as they felt that their objects, collections and stories could be easily found elsewhere. This was because their story, they felt, was just one of many. This does, however, suggest that it would be possible to extract a community story from the collective. This was emphasised by participants who spoke about their collections being a reflection of the socioeconomic situation in China's past; those collections which were a representation of blended families; and those who felt as though their family collections simply represented everyday life.

There were, additionally, specific items in the family collections that helped participants feel connected not just to specific members - past and present - of their family, but also to their culture. These kinds of connections are those with which we forge our sense of identity. This exploration has helped to unearth the links between family collections, family stories and histories, and the stories and histories of the communities with which that family has ties.

Word Count: 9700

11. Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

1. What is your family's background? Particularly, your family's heritage and what prompted the move to New Zealand?
2. Do you feel connected to your family's country? Do you feel connected to New Zealand?
3. Are there items or records that your family has kept as part of a family collection? If so, what are they?
4. Are these items important to you? Why or why not?
5. Do these items connect you to your family's heritage? Do they connect you to your life in New Zealand?
6. Who is responsible for this collection?
7. How is this collection managed, organised, and preserved?
8. Do you think the collection tells your family's story? How so?
9. Can you see yourself keeping this collection and adding to it in the future? Why or why not?
10. Could you imagine big institutions (e.g. museums, archives, libraries) in New Zealand finding value in your family's collection? Why or why not?

Appendix 2. Transcription Guidelines

The goal is to provide an intelligent transcription. Questions from the interviewer will be in bold, while the responses from the interviewee are in normal text. Each speaker should start on a new line. For example:

How are you today?

Good. How are you?

I'm okay.

The following examples address common issues that transcribers face and give guidelines to ensure consistency.

When in the recording...	In the transcription...	Example
You are unsure what the speaker is saying	Information and timestamp inside square brackets	Sorry! I am [unintelligible 12.13] on Friday.
You can guess what the speaker is saying	Information and timestamp inside square brackets after the guessed word or phrase	Sorry! I am busy [uncertain 12.13] on Friday.
The speaker stops and starts a sentence or phrase	Ignore false starts unless they portray extra meaning	NA.
The speaker uses filler words such as 'um' or 'like'	Ignore filler words unless they portray extra meaning	NA.
The speaker uses shortened words or combined words such as 'dunno' or 'cos'	Use the shortened version, remaining consistent throughout	I dunno about that.
The speaker makes non-verbal noises such as coughing or laughing	Ignore non-verbal noises	NA.
The speaker directly quotes someone else	Include quotation in quotation marks and use standard English grammar	She said, "I'm not really what I'm doing." I was so surprised.
The speaker uses numbers	For numbers fewer than 10, use the word format.	I asked her three times how many cookies she wanted. She said she wanted 75.

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