

# Collecting for Grassroots social history and everyday life of PRC

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# “Sinological garbology”

**Michael Schoenhals**, Swedish sinologist, **Lund University**

“we now have occasional access to caches of archive materials and primary sources that come to us courtesy of the messy chaotic forces of China’s booming market economy. In some ways, they constitute an even more valuable research resource for the historian”

“I have in mind, for example, the discarded contents of filing cabinets in enterprises that have gone bankrupt and Party institutions that have been merged out of existence. This is ‘raw’ material, never intended to be preserved for any particular historian’s future purposes.”

Sinology and historical research on Mao’s China: some personal observations. 2004

# Why alternative sources

- Research interests on social history and everyday life
- Availability of scattered danwei archives, personal dossiers and ephemera provides new ideas and perspectives for historical research
- Access obstacles to the state archives

# The collection at Stanford

- Types: danwei (working units) administrative documents (文书档案) and personal dossiers (人事档案)
- Number of files: 80 feet. 70+ danwei, 800+ individuals' personal dossiers.
- Places: more from Beijing, Nanjing, Hebei, Sichuan, Shanghai.
- Time: 1949-1990s, mostly in 1950s-1970s.



# Administrative files

- Administrative files: reports, conference /meeting recordings, publications, speeches, procedures and plans, financial documents, registration forms, documents from higher offices, etc.
- Subject matters: significant part related to a series of political campaigns, on human resource management, cadres review, labor union activities, legal cases, self-criticisms and confessions, details of policy implementation, etc.

檢奉材料

江蘇省...

中共江甯水泥厂委员会

公元一九五二年

一宗

字第一

宗生

公元一九五二年 月 日

一宗

字第一

宗生

卷

五卷分子  
登記表

事故檔

公元一九五二年 月 日

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# Personal dossiers

- Personal filing system started with Yan'an Rectification campaigns
- “Historical testimony” for studying and understanding ordinary people's political life
- Typical content of a personal dossier: registration forms, personal history, application forms for memberships, thought reports, study reports, confession, self-criticism, internal review reports, promotion or punishment records, etc.



# Characteristics of the collection

- Grassroots social history and everyday life of ordinary people
- Details of operations, policy implementation and local practice
- Variety in locality, governmental levels, economic sectors, and social status
- fragmented

# Issues/challenges

- Privacy and confidentiality
- Access: record and finding aid
- Legibility
- Preservation

Thank you !