
Chinese Research Team Report

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Introduction

This report addresses the feasibility of applying InterPARES principles in China. The overall conclusion is that there is nothing in the InterPARES intellectual framework that is strongly at odds with archives management and administration in China. There exists, however, a significant gap between the current Chinese laws and regulations and the practical situations of archival work.

The following assessment is based on the Chinese contexts.

Principles overall

Juridical context

The Archives Law of the People's Republic of China provides an overall framework within which most of the principles and processes developed by the InterPARES Project could be implemented. But there are some exceptions. For instance, there is no inexorable connection between the definition of an archived record and the life-cycle process of a record in the Chinese archival legal system. Therefore, one or two InterPARES principles might not be suitable to the Chinese context.

Administrative context

In view of the actual situations and future demands of the management of electronic records and archives in China, the findings of the InterPARES research should be fully used for reference in the future development of policies and standards of archives and records management.

Technological context

In China, basically there exists a technological context appropriate to the realization of InterPARES principles, but it is not a universal phenomenon. Starting in 2002, China will integrate information technology with records management systems to guarantee an information management supported more efficiently by information technology through relevant government regulations.

Individual Principles

- *address records specifically rather than digital objectives generally* - This principle is reflected in the Archiving and Archival Management of Electronic Records issued as a

national standard in China.

- *focus on authentic electronic records* - This principle is a basic requirement for developing management methods and standards. At present, the State Archives Administration of China (SAAC) adopts a policy requiring that hard copies be made for important electronic records in order to protect their authenticity.
- *recognize and provide for the fact that authenticity is most at risk when records are transmitted across space or time* - This fact is fully recognized by those government agencies concerned, and archival departments in China, which have taken relevant measures to prevent and reduce the risk.
- *recognize that preservation of authentic electronic records is a continuous process* - The process of continuous preservation of electronic records is explicitly stipulated in standards issued by the SAAC.
- *be based on the . . . concepts of a trusted record-keeping system and the role of the preserver as trusted custodian* - The archival institution is vested with the role of the preserver as a trusted custodian by Chinese law. However, due to the different extent of application of information technology in various record-creating agencies, the capability of fully ensuring the reliability of records in their record-keeping system is still lacking. Where needed, the archival department will take the responsibility of supervision to improve the credibility of records in the record-keeping system.
- be predicated on the understanding that it is not possible to preserve an electronic record as a stored physical object: it is only possible to preserve the ability to reproduce the record - There is a different view of this principle in China. Based on the above understanding, we believe that at present we should maintain as much as possible all the physical media of electronic records so as to preserve their authenticity.
- recognize that the physical and intellectual components of an electronic record do not necessarily coincide and that the concept of digital component is distinct from the concept of element of documentary form - The former point is increasingly recognized. However, it is not easy to allow the diplomatic concept of “element of documentary form” to be accepted and adopted in Chinese archival practice.
- *specify the requirements a copy of a record should satisfy to be considered equivalent to an original* - In the case of current management situation in China, the requirements to be satisfied will not depend on the copy of a record itself but on the technical acceptance and legal confirmation of a series of processes used to create, transfer, and migrate electronic records. The key factor primarily relates to legal confirmation.
- *integrate records appraisal in the continuous process of preservation* - This principle is clearly reflected in the SAAC standards, which require that archival description should be developed at the same time that appraisal is made for selecting electronic records for archival preservation.

- explicitly state that the entire process of preservation must be thoroughly documented as a primary means for protecting and assessing authenticity over the long term - This principle is reflected in the SAAC standards.
- *explicitly recognize that the traditional principle . . . that the records have not been inappropriately altered* - This principle is not carried out properly in China. However, it has been stressed in the administrative practice.
- recognize that the preserver is concerned with both the assessment and the maintenance of the authenticity of electronic records - Archival departments assess and confirm the authenticity of electronic records when the records are filed for archival preservation. The departments should also maintain the authenticity of the records after they have been transferred to their custody. This maintenance is a mission of archival departments.
- *draw a clear distinction between the preservation of the authenticity of records and the authentication of a record* - Drawing such a distinction is considered unnecessary in China. An archival department is not entrusted with the authority to authenticate a particular electronic record.

Conclusion

The InterPARES findings provide a helpful reference for the research on the archiving and archival management of electronic records being conducted in China. Most of the InterPARES principles will find their reflection in the Chinese practice; for the few that do not apply to China, the main obstacles relate to the different cultural and social contexts.