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**Cooperation on Local History and the Concept of Network
Building between Libraries, Museums and Archives in China**

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Abstract:

Chinese ancient books and local history documents are collected in archives, libraries, museums, and other academic institutions all over the country. This paper introduces the cooperation in document conservation and cataloging that has occurred between ALM in China. It briefly describes The Digital Local History Project constructed by National Library of China. And, finally, it proposes the concept of cooperation between archives, libraries, and museums in digitizing local history.

In China, many ancient books and local documents are collected in libraries, museums and archives, including ancient books of the minorities. For many years, these institutions have not only made great efforts to preserve these valuable documents, but have also made great achievements by cooperating with each other in their collection, processing, and utilization. Libraries have played the decisive role in this cooperation.

In an increasingly digital and network environment, the processing and utilization of ancient books and local history documents should develop in the direction of digitization and

online access via the Web. This paper introduces the cooperation that has been done between ALM and *The Digital Local History Project*. Furthermore, some ideas are proposed about the partnership between libraries, museums and archives in digitizing local history.

I. Contents and methods of cooperation in local documentation between ALM in China

In China it is difficult to unite libraries, museums, and archives into one institution to collect and process documents because they belong to different departments. However, these three institutions have been cooperating in processing documents since the 1980s. Until now there have been several methods of cooperation with respect to local documentation.

The first method is the investigation and cataloging of local history documents.

1. Cooperation in compiling Chinese genealogy catalogs.

The Chinese people have preserved many genealogies which comprise one of the important parts of Chinese traditional culture. Pedigrees, biographies, and other materials about a family are recorded in Chinese genealogies, including much material about local history, local literature, migration, demography, sociology, etc. Chinese genealogies are collected in different libraries, museums, archives and other academic institutions. In recent years these valuable documents have been jointly processed and cataloged by these collecting institutions.

Here are three union catalogs of Chinese genealogies which have been cooperatively compiled by libraries, museums, and archives. Among them, one is about the genealogies of Zhejiang province and the other two include genealogies from all over the country.

The first one is the *Chinese Genealogies General Catalog*. This is the earliest genealogies catalog published in Mainland China. In this catalog, 14,719 Chinese genealogies published before 1949 are recorded including those collected overseas. Based on previous investigations, the Chinese genealogies catalog project was carried out in 1984 under the sponsorship of the National Archives Bureau, Department of History of Nankai University of China, and Institute of History of the Chinese Academy Social Sciences.¹ With the support of Chinese Ministry of Culture, National Archives Bureau, and Chinese Ministry of Education,² staff from 438 collecting institutions participated in the project, including 113 libraries, 230 archives, 29 museums and 66 other collecting institutions.³ This catalog also records the Chinese genealogies from *the Chinese Rare Old Books Catalog* and from other genealogies

catalog books published in the United States and in Japan. From the *Chinese Genealogies General Catalog*, the collections of the Chinese genealogies all over the world can be learned.

The second one is the *Zhejiang Genealogies Abstract Catalog*. The Jiang-Zhe area had a very prosperous genealogical culture in ancient times. Many Zhejiang genealogies with rich materials and characteristics are preserved until now. This catalog includes 12,778 Zhejiang genealogies collected in different institutions in China and overseas, as well as 512 titles of genealogies of other provinces collected in Zhejiang province. The 6,097 titles with abstracts were collected in this province, and 6,681 titles without abstracts were collected in other areas. Zhejiang Library proposed the catalog project first in 2001, and other collecting institutions in Zhejiang province responded to it immediately. Over 200 staff from 102 institutions, including libraries, museums, and archives from province, cities, and counties, cooperatively edited the catalog.⁴ Zhejiang People's Press published the catalog in October 2005. Now, a digital version of the catalog has been published on the website of Zhejiang library, and can be searched on Internet.

The last one is the *General Catalog of Chinese Genealogies*. This is the first special world catalog of Chinese genealogies. This catalog will record 60,000 Chinese genealogies for 608 surnames published in Chinese before 2003. Besides some private collections, most of the genealogies are deposited in different institutions of China, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao, and other countries all over the world.

The *General Catalog of Chinese Genealogies* project was proposed by the Shanghai Library and adopted at the First Conference of Chinese Resources Cooperation and Development which was sponsored and organized by National Library of China and held in June, 2000. The conference aimed to provide an opportunity for library and information professionals to discuss and exchange ideas on cooperation in sharing Chinese resources. Chinese document collecting institutions from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao and overseas participated in the first conference.

Every aspect of a genealogy is involved in the catalog, such as book title, creator, places of domicile, edition, physical description, published time, name of the ancestral temple, key ancestors and celebrities, locations where lineage members settled, etc, that are important materials for research and looking for ancestors. Nine hundred institutions from China and overseas have participated in the project, including the National Library of China, National Museum of China, the First Historical Archives, and other libraries, museums, and archives from different provinces, cities, and counties, as well as from the United States, Singapore, Japan, Australia, and Europe. The catalog will be published soon, and the Shanghai library

plans to digitize it for the public to search on the Internet.⁵

2. Cooperation in compiling a catalog of the ancient books of ethnic minorities.

China has fifty-five ethnic minorities living in the different places; many of them have historical documents preserved today that also are an important part of Chinese culture. These valuable documents record the history, economy, culture, arts and customs of minority areas; some documents have been successfully processed and cataloged by libraries, museums, and archives.

Here are two catalog books of the ancient minorities' documents; one has been finished, and the other is being compiled now.

The first one is the *Catalog of China's Ancient Books in Old Mongolian*. This is the first catalog which gives an overview of ancient books in Mongolian script collected in China. In 1994, eleven institutions, including the National Library of China, Inner Mongolia University Library, and Central Nationality University Library proposed the project. As the main sponsor and organizer, the National Library of China took responsibility of directing and compiling and applying for support from IFLA/ALP.

This catalog records 13,100 titles of ancient Mongolian books and some rubbings from inscriptions including those published in Inner Mongolia before May 1947 and others published outside Inner Mongolia around the country before October 1949. The catalog also has an appendix that gives a concise bibliography of 365 titles of ancient Mongolian documents republished after October 1949.

It includes the documents of 80 private collectors and 179 institutions, including libraries, museums, and archives. Staff from these institutions from every league or city, county or banner all over Inner Mongolia and from other related provinces participated in the project. The Beijing Library Press published this book in May 2000.⁶

The second one is the *Catalog of Abstracts of the Ancient Books of China's Minorities*. In 1997 the National Minorities Committee started a plan for compiling the catalog in order to investigate the collections of ancient books of China's ethnic minorities all over the country. The abstract catalog is planned to record all the titles of the ancient books extant today which were written in the scripts of the minority nationalities.

This catalog is classified according to administrative jurisdictions and will be edited jointly by the libraries, archives, museums and other related institutions in different areas. The National Library of China is responsible for ancient Mongolian documents collected in the

Beijing area, the First Historical Archives for ancient Manchu documents, and Chinese Center for Tibetan Studies for ancient Tibetan documents.

The *Catalog of Abstracts of the Ancient Books of China's Minorities* will include 60 volumes, 100 items, and 300,000 titles. So far the Chinese Grand Encyclopedia Press has published the *Naxi* volume and *Bai* volume; the others will be finished by 2008.

After processing and cataloging China's ancient local documents will be well utilized in academic research and local economic construction, and they will promote the dissemination of Chinese culture.

The second method is to jointly carry out the national *Chinese Ancient Books Conservation Plan*.

According to the originally estimate, about 30,000,000 volumes of Chinese ancient books, including the ancient books of ethnic minorities and many kinds of local history documents, are held in libraries, museums, archives and other collecting institutions in China. But many of them are in poor condition and need repair. At the beginning of 2005 the Chinese Ministry of Culture started the *Chinese Ancient Books Conservation Plan* to investigate the quantity and preservation condition of ancient books in China and overseas and to finish restoring valuable documents belonging to the first and second grade relics within fifteen years. Ancient local history, genealogies, and minorities' documents should be investigated as part of this plan.

This project needs the participation of all the institutions that collect ancient books. Now, the National Library of China is in charge of the program. The experts in ancient books conservation and restoration from National Library of China, the Palace Museum, National Museum of China, the First Historical Archives, Central Archives, Peking University Library, etc, are participating and discussing how to preserve China's ancient books.

The third method is to unite library and archives into one institution to collect and utilize local historical documents.

In 2003, in Taida District of Tianjin a new library was constructed. The old library and the archives were merged into one institution with name of Taida Library but the name of Taida Archives has also been retained. The library has two centers; one is the documents information center for books, the other is archives information center for archive materials. The two centers have a division of labor but also cooperate with each other in some areas. The library is planning to collect and utilize documentary resources by constructing the *Taida*

Local Documents Database, Taida Talents Database, Taida Doctor and Master's Papers Database, Taida City Construction Database, etc. Furthermore, based on the materials collected Taida Library will compile the *Cultural, Educational, and Health History of Taida*.

⁷As far as Taida Library is concerned, there are still some things to be promoted including standards for collecting and cataloging, building a network, and digitizing documents.

In China, many ancient books and local history documents in different nationalities languages are collected in libraries, museums and archives. The three institutions have been cooperating with each other in organizing, preserving and bringing to light documents and have made great achievements. In the automation and network environment they will have many chances to cooperate, particularly in building and sharing digital resources for local history documents.

II. The practice of digital local history at the National Library of China and the conception of cooperatively building and sharing ancient local history resources.

1. The practice of digital local history at the National Library of China

Many kinds of local history documents are collected in the NLC, such as local histories, genealogies, Spring Festival pictures, old photos, and literature and historical materials. Some of them have been digitalized. As of now, 200 Spring Festival pictures have been imaged and published in the *Spring Festival Pictures Masterpieces* column on the website of the NLC. Every picture has an abstract with a brief story, background, characteristics, and reference information. Besides these pictures 3,000 old photos have also been scanned and provided with a description of the title, time, place and content; these are being prepared for publication.

Digital Local History is a project of the NLC to digitize ancient local histories. The library holds over 6,000 titles in 120,000 thread-bound volumes published before 1949, or seventy percent of the ancient Chinese local histories that are extant today. The *Digital Local History* project is to digitize the collection and create an images database and a full-text database. Based on the latter several knowledge databases will also be completed. Full-text searching and single and complex searching will be realized between these databases.

Searching on ancient characters and modern characters, variant characters, and taboo characters will also be achieved. The character sets of Unicode 4.0, which consists of 71,000 characters, have been used in the full-text database. The computer can create the variant characters and taboo characters that are not in these character sets; this will avoid having many

image characters and make searching more accurate.

In order to facilitate the reading of the original books in the image database three levels of catalogs are provided, namely the book name catalog, the volume title catalog, and the article title catalog. By searching a catalog users can obtain the exact volume or article directly.

So far about 1,680,000 pages have been scanned and 900,000 pages have been transformed into full-text. A portion of the images have been published in the *Digital Local History* column on the website of the NLC. ⁸Now, the project is in the process of scanning the rest of the ancient local histories. A complete publishing system for all resource databases is envisioned in which the public can search and browse freely.

Digital Local History is an experimental project for digitization of Chinese ancient documents that has not only drawn on the accomplishments of past projects but has also enriched experience for the digitization of ancient books in the future. For example, some Chinese characters outside of Unicode 4.0 in the ancient local histories will be reported to IRG (Ideograph Rapporteur Group) after being discerned by professionals and identified by specialists in ancient characters.

A Chinese local history is the encyclopedia of a region, in which, history, geographical position and conditions, and culture are recorded, including territory, historical events and figures, economic situation, climate, products, mountains and rivers, education, custom, historical relics, etc. Local history documents are the most valuable reference materials for knowing about the history and current situation of some regions, and also for academic research about history, sociology, folk custom and folk literature. *Digital Local History* will facilitate the reader's use of these valuable materials as well as be good for academic research and ancient books conservation.

2. Cooperation in digitizing ancient local history between libraries, museums, and archives

Many ancient local history documents are collected in libraries, museums, and archives in China, and these institutions have jointly compiled the *Chinese Local History Union Catalog* and the *Chinese Local History Abstract Catalog*. However, cooperation between these institutions is not dynamic enough. Libraries, museums, and archives should increase cooperation in processing and digitization in order to realize the construction and sharing of digital resources. The processing and digitization of ancient local histories can be done step by step.

First, a comprehensive catalog should be compiled based on the catalogs mentioned above and an investigation of the distribution of Chinese ancient history in all institutions, particularly in archives. What's more, the quantity and preservation condition of ancient books in China and overseas have not been surveyed yet; it will be done in the *Chinese Ancient Books Conservation Plan*. As one of the kinds of ancient books, ancient local history can be investigated at the same time.

Second, an ancient Chinese local histories database should be constructed for the convenience of research by the public on the Web. In many institutions most of the local histories have not been cataloged yet, this affects the utilization of these documents to a large extent. In order to save funds and time, these institutions can use the catalog data of the NLC, after modifying it according to their different conditions, because over seventy percent of all extant Chinese local histories are deposited in NLC and have been completely cataloged. Now, many libraries and information institutions are jointly mapping out various standards about the digital library. NLC is responsible for the standards for local history and has finished *local history metadata description standards* and *local history metadata description regulations* which can be utilized in cataloging local histories in China.

Third, the *Digital Local History* project of the NLC and the construction of the images and full-text resources databases of ancient local history in China should be finished. Now there are over 8,200 titles of ancient histories deposited in different institutions; unique copies are less than ten percent of the total,⁹ while the others are duplicated in different institutions. It will cost a large amount of funds to digitize ancient books, so this job should be done cooperatively, and duplicated work must be avoided. The institutions with overlapping collections that have already been digitized by the NLC can share its resources through a contract and focus on digitizing the other thirty percent their own special collections. The digital resources databases, including all of the ancient local histories, will be completed at last in this way.

China's ancient local histories are thread-bound books published before 1949, so copyright is not a problem for digitization. But several prerequisites should be given for cooperation between multiple institutions. First, practical programs and agreements must be mapped out for cooperation between them and should involve project management, funds, resources utilization, and rights and obligations. Second, various standards for digitizing ancient local history should be spelled out as well as the principles and methods for solving common problems. With the standards and agreements, digital resources will be cooperatively constructed and shared. Finally, one premise for digitizing local history is financial support.

This is a project with significant meanings which must be recognized by the government and the society--it will protect and disseminate our valuable ancient document resources and promote the development of the traditional Chinese culture.

The preservation and processing of the ancient books of China's minorities and ancient local histories must be completed cooperatively by different institutions. In the digital and network environments, libraries, museums, and archives should jointly construct and share digital resources for ancient documents. This is the best way to effectively and economically integrate and utilize documentary resources that are distributed among different institutions.

¹ *Chinese Genealogies General Catalog* published by Zhonghua Book Bureau, September, 1997.

² National Archives Bureau, Chinese Ministry of Education, and Chinese Ministry of Culture, *The Information About Cooperatively Compiling Chinese Genealogies General Catalog*, November, 1984.

³ The figure is counted according to *Chinese Genealogies General Catalog*

⁴ *Zhejiang Genealogies Abstract Catalog*, published by Zhejiang People's Press, October 2005.

⁵ Wang Heming, *The Character of General Catalog of Chinese Genealogies*, *Library Journal*, 2006(1).

⁶ Wulin Xila, *The Summary of Compiling and Publishing Catalog of China's Ancient Books in Old Mongolian and. Catalog of Ganzhuer Danzhuer in Old Mongolian.*

⁷ Ji Xiaolin, *The Try and Thought on Jointly Organizing Books, Information, and Archives Information Data Work*, 2005(5).

⁸ <http://202.96.31.40:9080/chronic/index.htm>

⁹ The figure is counted according to *Chinese Local History Union Catalog*.