



68th IFLA Council and General Conference

August 18-24, 2002

Code Number: 076-137-E
Division Number: II
Professional Group: Genealogy and Local History
Joint Meeting with: -
Meeting Number: 137
Simultaneous Interpretation: -

A project for the Chinese culture: the compilation of the *General Catalogue of Chinese Genealogy*

Gu Yan
Shanghai Library
Shanghai, China

The Significance of Compiling the *General Catalogue of Chinese Genealogy*

Concept of the Chinese genealogy

Chinese genealogies are histories that record a patriarchal clan's pedigree and events. A classic Chinese genealogy is composed of a preface, table of contents, rules of compilation, family rules and instructions to be observed by clansmen, pictures of the ancestral temple, portraits and biographies of important clansmen, pedigree charts, pictures of tombs, treaties and contracts, a list of donors for producing the book, and a postscript. Genealogy is a significant supplementary source for academic research and tracing one's roots. It is also an indispensable component of Chinese history and culture.

Chinese genealogy catalogues

Five genealogy catalogues have been published to date:

- *Chinese Genealogies at the Genealogical Society of Utah*
- *Catalogue of Chinese Genealogies in Taiwan.*
- *Catalogue of Chinese Genealogies*
- *Comprehensive Catalogue of Chinese Genealogies*
- *Summary of Genealogies at the Shanghai Library*

The fact that none of the present catalogues is complete hampers the study of Chinese genealogy. In order to facilitate research in this field and in consideration of the needs of ordinary people, we decided to compile the *General Catalogue of Chinese Genealogy*.

Significance

Since the catalogue lists Chinese genealogies on a global scale, its importance lies in reflecting the physical distribution of Chinese genealogies. Traditionally genealogies were not allowed to be shown to non-clansmen and very few copies were produced. Today they remain semi-closed to the public. Researchers are, therefore, unable to make full use of genealogies. By publishing the catalogue, we mean to make some improvements in this situation. The catalogue also contains a good many descriptive items that impart essential information about a genealogy and satisfy the different needs of users. We believe the catalogue will help both domestic and overseas Chinese to trace their roots, and further, intensify the Chinese peoples' sense of community. It will also facilitate research in the social and natural sciences.

Compilation of the *General Catalogue of the Chinese Genealogy*

Difficulties that must be overcome in compiling the catalogue

- (i) Genealogies are huge in number. It is estimated that, if duplicates are not counted, there are about 50,000 titles of Chinese genealogies.
- (ii) Genealogies are widely dispersed. Chinese genealogies are scattered at home and abroad. Not all genealogies are kept in public institutions. A large number of genealogies are in the hands of private owners; so the total quantity is hard to estimate, but it must at least amount to tens of thousands.
- (iii) Cataloguers of genealogies must have professional skills. Genealogy has its own characteristics with which the various collectors may not be as familiar as trained librarians.

Execution of the project

- (i) Inaugural meetings were convened. In June 2000, the project was approved by the Conference of Cooperation on Constructing and Sharing Global Chinese Documents and Resources held in Beijing. From November 27-28 in the same year, the first compilation meeting was held at the Shanghai Library, signaling the formal start of the project. The meeting arranged editors, defined individual responsibilities, drew up cataloguing rules, and set the project schedule. In February and March of 2001, editors, who were in charge of different regions, held editorial meetings separately and arranged specific tasks. These meetings established the project on solid ground.
- (ii) Editorial board was established. The Shanghai Library acted as editor-in-chief; the Genealogical Society of Utah, Cybersia.com Singapore, the National Library of China, and the Taiwan Research Center for Sinology were deputy editors-in-chief; and editors were mainly provincial or regional libraries in China.
- (iii) Project was publicized. By publicizing the project through the media, we enlightened the public about genealogy. As a result, many organizations and individuals became willing to donate genealogies or let us catalogue them. This was very helpful for surveying and calling for private genealogies. Meanwhile, we managed to gain support from leaders and establish coordination among organizations. The Ministry of Culture extended its warm support to the project.
- (iv) Correct procedures were followed. For every region, we appointed one organization to be responsible

for cataloguing local genealogies. The records were to be sent later to the Shanghai Library for proofreading. The project was estimated to last three years, including one year for cataloguing separately, one year for final proofreading, and one year for publication and adaptation to the Web. Such a compiling method was already proved successful before.

(v) Quality was ensured through training. Because the cataloguing of genealogies is a highly professional activity, editors trained cataloguers through lectures and practical sessions, arranged tutors, and gave person-to-person assistance. Editors and cataloguers were required to strictly follow the rules. No required descriptive items could be omitted. Whether the genealogy was kept publicly or privately, whether it was old or new, we strove to include it in the catalogue as long as we could get the information..

(vi) *Briefing on Cataloguing Chinese Genealogies* was issued. To date we have published five briefings, one for each phase of the project. In this way we have been able to communicate with organizations at all levels and to summarize our experience in a timely way.

Breakthroughs and innovative points in the *General Catalogue of Chinese Genealogy*

(i) The *General Catalogue* is the first special subject catalogue to comprehensively list Chinese genealogies around the world. Its scope includes genealogies of the various nationalities of China, recorded in Chinese characters, and printed before 2000, whether collected by Chinese (including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macao) and international book collecting institutions or scattered among the common people. These genealogies involve Chinese overseas and clans that have multiplied and developed in the motherland. The *General Catalogue* has collected various types of genealogies named according to family, nationality, generation, branch, and clan, as well as general and universal genealogies, etc. They include all forms of publication such as printed copies, non-printed manuscripts, reprinted copies, and microfilm copies.

(ii) Features fully unfolding the basic elements of the genealogy are highlighted. The descriptive items in the *General Catalogue* entries include title, statement of responsibility, edition, physical description, notes on key ancestors and famous persons, binding, collector, and other comments.

(iii) Data retrieval on the Internet to be facilitated. Apart from being published in written form, the *General Catalogue* will also be made available on the Internet, thus providing more convenient searching for Chinese around the world.

Status of the *General Catalogue* Project and Its Future

Since March 2001 the work of compilation has spread methodically, and now the work of assembling the catalogue is just beginning.

Progress of compilation

From February last year the compilation of bibliographic records was started successively nationwide and in various overseas localities, winning simultaneously the attention and response of local departments at different levels. Through the end of last year, more than ten editorial committees had finished their assigned tasks. Some have submitted collected data in the form of batches, others will complete their work in the first half of this year. The speed of compilation has gone smoothly according to plan.

Quantity of submitted records

Based on statistics compiled by the different editing committees (some still have to report), the number of records has already reached around 60,000 titles (including duplicates); this total, however, does not include over 20,000 privately owned titles, so the actual number will increase in the wake of the delivery of remaining records.

Quality of submitted records

Since the beginning of 2002, the Shanghai Library has already assembled some bibliographic records. Generally speaking, the majority of the records basically meet the editing requirements of the catalogue, but there are still some problems with the identification of the native place of a genealogy, edition, ancestral hall name, notes, and ancestors. These problems are unavoidable due to the complexities of compilation work and uneven mastery of the required items by compilers; we have asked the party concerned to perfect and improve the items which have problems or fail to meet the requirements.

As a whole, compiling the *General Catalogue of Chinese Genealogy* is a heavy task, and we have a long, long way to go, but we firmly believe that we will achieve this difficult work with the enthusiastic support of the Chinese people worldwide.