

## **Breaking through Difficulties with the Adoption of an Innovating Developmental Path: the Genealogy Collection of Hubei Provincial Library**

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### **Abstract:**

*Compiling genealogies has recently become increasingly popular in China due to the rapid development of the Chinese economy and targeted favourable policies across the country. This paper summarises the practices that Hubei Provincial Library has taken in breaking through the difficulties of genealogy-resource acquisition with the adoption of an innovative developmental path, thus leading to the rapid growth of the collection of Hubei genealogies.*

*Specific steps have been taken for: (a) broadening the channel of resources, (b) building exchange platforms, (c) optimizing the collection, and (d) providing free repair services on ancient genealogies. Additionally, there is a special service for digitizing original records, with the permission from relevant stakeholders, thus increasing the digital collection of genealogies. With the commitment of the provincial library and the adoption of such innovative practices, the first general catalogue in the Hubei area has been successfully completed, and a Full-text Image Database of Genealogy will be provided, which helps readers trace their roots and facilitating various academic research activities in China.*

**Keywords:** Genealogy; Innovation; Genealogy collection; China

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## Introduction

Genealogy is one of the three major documents along with national history and local chronicles. It provides the public with the records of the background, development and events of families and clans in various periods of time. Genealogy is often referred to as a history book of a family.

Chinese genealogy has a long history of extensive compilation from generation to generation. Since the mid-Ming Dynasty (1368AD-1644AD), building ancestral temples and compiling genealogy became an important part of clan life. Genealogy contains deep historical accumulation and cultural value, which is an essential part of our national culture.

There are several difficulties in collecting genealogies. First, the secrecy and non-published nature of genealogy makes the collection of genealogy difficult if not impossible. Although Hubei province is known as a popular area for genealogy compilation, genealogy is generally an informal publication. It is usually kept in private and rarely published in public. Second, genealogy is hard to preserve in the old time due to the social unrest and the destruction of natural disasters. The collection of genealogy is further discouraged due to the fact that the genealogy was once regarded as a feudal legacy. As a result, it is usually difficult to know the details of genealogies in history and the present situation in the accurate manner.

In recent years, compiling genealogies has experienced a huge upsurge because of the development of Chinese economy and the changing orientation of the public policies. Hubei Province is one of the richest areas in genealogies in China. Genealogy compilation is becoming more and more popular. As a result of continued advances in digital technologies, the form of genealogy collection has been enriched. Taking this opportunity, Hubei Provincial Library has actively changed the collection process. This leads to the adoption of an innovative path in genealogy collection across the province. Following such an innovative path, the collection of genealogies has involved in various forms including paper preservation, digital-scanning preservation and microfilm with a specific focus on digital preservation. This is due to the unique nature of ancient genealogies as they are usually are hard to obtain.

As a local cultural institution, Hubei Provincial Library innovates various developmental paths, including broadening channels of resources, such as cooperating with local government, carrying out village investigations and getting information from resource-sharing platforms, as well as building exchange platforms, such as setting up the Hubei Genealogy Collection Centre, holding "Hubei Genealogy Festival" cultural activities and using news medias to attract public participation, so as to promote the collection of genealogies.

After years of hard work, the number of Hubei genealogies collected by Hubei Provincial Library has increased from 200 in 2011 to more than 2400. Such collection consists of about 1500 paper genealogies, 600 digital genealogies and 240 microfilms- genealogies, with an annual increase of nearly 200. In the library, the earliest paper genealogy is Zhou's genealogy (Changsha, Hunan) in the forty-sixth year of Qianlong, Qing dynasty (1780AD) and the earliest digital genealogy is Chen's old genealogy which is found at Jiangzhou and copied in yellow damask silk in the fourteenth year of Hongzhi, Ming Dynasty (1501AD), in which the genealogical information can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618AD- 907AD) at the earliest.

## **Innovation Practices**

Hubei Provincial Library has continuously innovated the collection of genealogy over the years. Some of the innovative practices for the collection are summarised in the following.

### *Establishment of the Hubei Genealogy Collection Centre*

The Hubei Genealogy Collection Centre was officially established by the Hubei Provincial Library in May 2017. 50 civil genealogy enthusiasts were recruited to be the Genealogy Information Investigators of the Centre, whose main responsibilities are to focus on the genealogy collection and rescue work in the whole province. A genealogy records reading area has been set up in the Centre to provide convenient, free access to genealogical records and inquiry guidance for readers. This facilitates the information exchange between the centre and the readers, therefore improving the collection of genealogies.

### *Sponsorship of Hubei Genealogy Festival cultural activities*

The Hubei Genealogy Festival is a famous genealogy exchange activity for improving the awareness of the public on genealogies in China. Since 2009, Hubei Provincial Library has held this activity for ten consecutive years, which develops into the largest and most influential genealogy activity in a decade in China. Every year, hundreds of experts, enthusiasts and genealogical collectors from Hubei, Jiangxi, Anhui, Henan, Hunan and other provinces participate in the festival. Hubei Genealogy Festival has greatly promoted the collection and exchanges of genealogies by carrying out genealogy exhibitions, seminars, demonstrations of repair skills and other cultural exchanges activities. Thousands of genealogies are the first time shown in the public through Hubei Genealogy Festival cultural activities.

At the 10th Hubei Genealogy Festival in 2018, the genealogies of 22 rare surnames, such as Rang, Le, Wei and Pi, were exhibited at the Hubei Genealogy Collection Centre. Some of these surnames originated from the feudal-enseffment of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1046BC - 771BC) and the Spring and Autumn Period (770BC -476BC), some from the names of ancestors, and some from the Royal family. Through these various activities, more people become interested in genealogies and people's willingness to help contribute data is greatly stimulated. The number of donations increased year by year, and 208 in 38 kinds of genealogies were donated during the Hubei Genealogy Festival in 2018.

### *Genealogy census and village investigation*

Hubei Provincial Library participated in the compilation of the General Catalogue of Chinese Genealogy in the early period, which helps us clarify the genealogy resources and provides basic data for the genealogy resources construction in the library system in Hubei Province. For more than ten years, Hubei Provincial Library has been carrying out genealogy census continuously and searching for the genealogy through the village investigation with the help of grass-roots government. For example, Hubei Provincial Library has cooperated with the Local History and Chronicle Office of Hanchuan City in Hubei Province, to find genealogical resources. Officers are more familiar with local people and responsible for finding genealogies information. They transfer the information to us. The staff of Hubei Provincial Library will rent and borrow the original genealogy with owners' permission, then make digital scanning for preservation. When returning the original, we provide digital documents for both the owners and the office. For example, from the Huang's of Diaocha Lake in Hanchuan City, we found 4 complete genealogies compiled from the Republic of China (1912AD-1949AD) to the present,

which were borrowed for digital scanning then. Now, more than 70 digital scanning of genealogies have been collected by this way in Hanchuan City.

#### *Access to genealogical resources through innovative services*

Hubei Provincial Library participates in the genealogy compilation of many clans in Hubei Province actively, and provides necessary help, so as to know their progress and facilitate the collection of genealogy. For example, Hubei Provincial Library participated in the compilation conference of Fu's Genealogy of Northern Chu: Guogang Volume in Qichun County, Hubei Province on October 27, 2012. With their permission, Hubei Provincial Library obtain a copy for preservation.

Hubei Provincial Library is one of the few institutions that can perform professional repair of ancient books in Hubei area, and would like to provide free repair service for readers if necessary. This service not only solves the owners' repair troubles of damaged or incomplete genealogies, but also helps us find ancient information sources. Through renting and borrowing the original genealogies for digital preservation, Hubei Provincial Library has rapidly expanded its digital collection. For instance, Fan's genealogy editorial committee in Xishui County of Hubei Province, has found three old genealogies compiled in Qianlong forty-three years (1778AD), Daoguang eight years (1828AD) of Qing Dynasty, and the Republic of China thirty-three years (1944AD), which are badly damaged and need to repair. Learning the news, Hubei Provincial Library decided to provide free repair services for them. Through communication, Hubei Provincial Library has obtained digital scanned copies of these three precious genealogies after the repair with their permission.

#### *Co-construction and sharing of genealogical resources*

In order to integrate the genealogical records and obtain the related information better, Hubei Provincial Library and the other libraries of Hubei Province carry out the co-construction and sharing of genealogical resources program, and cooperate with museums, archives, and local chronicles offices. For example, due to the cooperative relationship with Hubei University of Science and Technology, we collaborated with Tongcheng Archives of Hubei Province and digitized 32 genealogies for preservation.

#### *Establishing relationships with genealogical institutions*

Establish relations with the genealogical compilation committees of different clans. For example, Hubei Provincial Library has kept in good touch with Zou Genealogy Compilation Committee of China. During the process of compiling Zou's genealogy, they offer more than 230 Zou Genealogies collected from the whole country to Hubei Provincial Library for digital scanning and preservation.

Establish relationships with genealogy-printing companies. These printing companies build a bridge of communication between genealogy collectors and Hubei Provincial Library. With the collectors' permission, Hubei Provincial Library obtains genealogies information annually through printing companies. For example, with the help of printing company, Ke Genealogy Editorial Committee of Daye City, Hubei Province, donated their genealogies for Hubei Provincial Library for preservation.

### *Making use of the mainstream media*

Broadcast Promotion. Hubei Provincial Library has planned and commenced the first genealogy radio program in Hubei Province, called Genealogy in Hubei, which aims to bring genealogical culture to widespread, divers audiences. Family rules and regulations are recorded as an essential part of Chinese genealogy. Thus, the preservation of genealogies will help Chinese inherit traditional morality and historical culture. This program tells the development of different clans and the change of their genealogies in the form of stories which helps audience know their ancestors and families better. We employ many folklore experts and genealogy experts to discuss the form and content of this program. Since we started the program, it has caused a wide range of social effects. Many listeners have a new and comprehensive understanding about genealogy. More people are willing to donate genealogies after learning that Hubei Provincial Library is a public welfare institution for genealogy protection.

We also use news reporting. For instance, People's Daily, the most famous newspaper in China, introduced the genealogy collection and service of Hubei Provincial Library on April 5th, 2018, which helps advertise Hubei Genealogy Collection Centre as well for free. Through news media, more people from all over the country donate genealogies to Hubei Provincial Library.

### *Finding Genealogy Sources through Networking*

With the development of genealogical compilation, more and more related websites have emerged. Groups on social media, such as QQ and WeChat groups have been established by various clans, which promote the acquisition and exchange of genealogical information. In addition, many genealogical experts and genealogical enthusiasts have established their own microblog and forums, which are also the effective ways to find genealogy sources. For example, we often find some practical genealogy information from Genealogy Research Forum and Chinese Genealogy Forum. The websites of second-hand bookstores are also useful for getting genealogical information.

## **Results and discussion**

Through the innovative practice of genealogy collection, Hubei Provincial Library has made rapid development in genealogy collection, especially in genealogies of the Hubei area.

### *Publication of the first general genealogy catalogue in Hubei Province*

In May 2019, the General Catalogue of Genealogy in Hubei Province, supported by the National Publishing Fund of China and the Social Science Fund of Hubei Province, was officially published. This is the first general catalogue of genealogy in Hubei Province and constitutes a dramatic enhancement in data retrieval and review.

### *Establishment of a Full-text Image Database of Genealogy*

In order to meet the needs of reading and researching, Hubei Provincial Library has launched the project of Full-text Image Database of Genealogy, which provides services for users to seek their roots and ancestors and do academic research. It will open this year.

## Conclusion

In summary, Hubei Provincial Library has made rapid developments in genealogy collection and formed a high quality, high functioning network for the collection and utilization of data. The overall system is subject to continuous innovation and expansion now going on 10 plus years. Our system insures that a large number of precious historical records are preserved and this information as a data base for reader services. Relying on the resources, Hubei Provincial Library will try the best to meet readers' needs in an ever improving manner.

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