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Study on Hurdles of Genealogy Collection Development in Taiwan: A Journey to Explore the Path of Ancestors

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Abstract:

Genealogy carries records of ancestors from generations to generations and brought along with path of travelling, immigration, marriage, reproduction, cultural of family rules and tradition. Genealogy became more regarded in western world that takes much efforts of finance and time to trace and collect related materials. Public libraries ought to consider that genealogy needs more efforts to acquire, organize and put to utilization. However, when author of this study tried to trace the origin of the ancestor revealed that limited material are available. The study also found out that the correctness of the existing genealogy records were not reliable. This study bringing facts of difficulties of genealogy collection in Taiwan and seeking further discussion for workable solutions.

Keywords: Genealogy, household certificate, shrine board of ancestors, family tree, family records

1. Genealogy Definition

Genealogy (definition) carries origin heritage and history of families. It indicates trace of moves, marriages, descending of family tree, cultural developments, family rules, and related circumstances regarding interpersonal and racial relations. Genealogy also connected with literary, social, historical, societal system, values of education and legality matters (Baidu Baike, 2018).

In addition to spending time and money to collect information of genealogy and family history, more reasons including identifying truth of family history, seeking relationships with known celebrates, understanding their ancestors' involvement of historical events, tracing medical history for understanding risks of heritages diseases, identifying degree of family heritages, finding bio-parents of adopted-children, identifying relationship of parent-child genes, religious trace (such as Jesus Christ Church of Latter-day Saints), understanding relations of family and community, study of history, understanding more of relatives, preserve family culture, preserve family tradition and culture. From perspectives of philosophy, genealogy answers common questions of "*Who am I?*", "*Where was I from?*", and "*what future brings?*". Thus, genealogy connects geographical and regional cultural that is why genealogy is especially important at current times (Why Genealogy Is Important, 2016).

People in the United States seeks information of their ancestors become popular and related materials are becoming important. However, tracing and collecting related materials takes lot of time and efforts because it is a complex work. Public libraries provides services of collecting and preserving related material to fulfil needs of publics genealogy search (Genealogy Committee of the History Section of the Reference and User Services Association, 2007).

In comparison with the circumstances of USA, Genealogy or family history information is not common in Taiwan. As example of the author who tried to trace family history of her own. Errors occur and the correctness of family history need further identification from historic experts. This paper will collect and organize related and existing literature to find out current situation of genealogy information in Taiwan and challenges and difficulties of collecting genealogy and local history.

2. Collections of Genealogy and Family History in Taiwan

Collection of Genealogy and Family History in Taiwan is not wealthy, brief description as follow.

- (1) Union Catalog Database of Genealogy of Taiwan Area
(<http://rbook2.ncl.edu.tw/Search/Index/3>)

This Database collects about 28,846 items from 11 units (or agencies) of Genealogy or Family History in Taiwan.

Table I. Union Catalog Database of Genealogy of Taiwan Area (2012)

Participating Units (or Agencies)	Nbrs.
Library of Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica https://www.ioe.sinica.edu.tw/index.aspx?SiteID=530164216455074056	208
Fusi Nian Library, Academia Sinica http://lib.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/	1923
Taipei City Archives http://www.chr.gov.taipei/	845
National Taiwan Library https://www.ntl.edu.tw/mp.asp?mp=1	30
Taiwan's Surname Research Society http://www.surname.com.tw/	278
The Institute of Yilan County History http://yihistory.e-land.gov.tw/Default.aspx	460
National Palace Museum https://www.npm.gov.tw/	9356
Academia Historica https://www.npm.gov.tw/	59
Taiwan Historica https://www.th.gov.tw/	236
National Central Library https://www.ncl.edu.tw/	1448
Wan Wan Zhai	970

(2)Database of Genealogical Documents, National Palace Museum

([@0:0:1:phmeta::/tts/npmmeta/metamain.htm](http://npmhost.npm.gov.tw/ttscgi/ttsweb?@0:0:1:phmeta::/tts/npmmeta/metamain.htm) @ @0.5135763713343471)

This Database collects 307 items of genealogy from Ming Dynasty, Ching Dynasty and Early stage of Republic of China, the image data in this Database is microfiche form, original material are scattered in different locations overseas.

(3) Family History and Book Catalog of Jesus Christ Church of Latter-day Saints

This catalog allows readers to retrieve *Family Search* online and various genealogy libraries or central catalogs (including books, on-line information, microfiche, micro-slides, and related publications)

Jesus Christ Church of Latter-day Saints, Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) was established in November 13th 1894 to collect genealogy materials around the world. The Society continued over one hundred years of collecting and researches. The GSU started in 1975 to produce microfilms of genealogy in Taiwan. "Chinese Genealogies at the Genealogical Society of Utah" edited by Ted. A. Telford, Melvin P. Thatcher, and Basil P. N. Yang in 1983 is a book about catalogs of microforms of genealogy which contains 3,109 items of Chinese genealogy from US, Japan, Hong Kong, UK, and Taiwan. The book also provides index of regional and family name categories (Xiao, 2017).

Jesus Christ Church of Latter-day Saints (<https://www.familysearch.org/>) also built family tree services to encourage church fellows to build their own family genealogy, to

explore family history and traditions to show respects to their ancestors. There are about 3000 registers in Taiwan, most are church fellows (Xiao, 2017).

3. Challenges and Difficulties of building Family Genealogy of Taiwan Families

Genealogy is very important, but not necessary to each and every individual. Family genealogy has its important meaning, however, the peculiar political situation and historical development between Mainland China and Taiwan resulted the problems of building family genealogy and difficulties of examining correctness and factors of the information while conducting studies of the genealogy and family history.

Genealogy studies were popular in 1960-1990 in Taiwan, it become less popular in recent years due to changes of society as reasons of following:

- (1) Immigrants of earlier stage (Ming Dynasty, Ching Dynasty Year ---) from China were strive for living and could not return back to China regularly to trace and archive their family history and their children disconnected with memory of the family, therefore trace of family history was discontinued.
- (2) The long time political separation discontinued the relations of families across the Taiwan-Straight.
- (3) The economic development of society and family structure, such as nuclear family, less children, individualize-oriented category resulted the new generation are lack of interest of genealogy and family history. The younger generation no longer emphasize on traditional culture and heritage continuum.
- (4) The westernization and materialism cultural cultivation in recent years, family history and genealogy is not prioritized in people's life.

A number of families preserved and edit their genealogy and family history book, the collection directly reflect individual family history and status that also preserve cultural partially, however, not everyone or individual has similar ideas about preserving genealogy or family history book. It is a major challenge and reason for libraries in Taiwan to acquire genealogy or family history material.

The correctness of existing genealogy or family history books are in doubt. The author conducted the family history tracing, via three different paths. The three paths include 1) Household Certificate, 2) Ancestor memorial tablet, 3) Yeh's Family tree.

(1) Household Certificate

Household Certificate of Japanese Occupation Period (1895-1945) was applied and the photo of the document as Figure 1.

Figure 1. Household Certificate example as Japanese Occupation Period (1895-1945)



Columns of Household Certificate include 1) residential address; 2) Origin; 3) Title (representative of the family); 4) Courses (records of moves, marriages, because marriages resulted members shift in the family), race (it said “Guang” i.e. “Hakka”, Opium (if there is a record on Opium taker), Foot binding (if the individual had foot binding record), variety of identity (on three kinds base) as shown on Table 2. Keypoints of records in the family history book during Japanese Occupation Period (1895–1945).

Table 2. Key points of records in the official household certificate during Japanese Occupation Period (1895–1945)

Brief Description	Residential Address	Origin	Position Title of the Family Representative	Update reasons	Race (or tribe)	Rank (3 kinds shown as Table 2)	Note or remarks such as: Opium in-taker or Foot binding

Household Certificate was a particular document of the period of Japanese Occupation Period, years back to 1895. Records before that could not be traced. Therefore the document could not reveal that if the author’s family was from China or a long time residence in Taiwan. Some people believed that Genealogy of Taiwan was produced by immigrants of Fujien Province and Guandong Province of China; some documents were produced after immigrants settled down in Taiwan (unknown authors, 2017). Above factors indicated that residents in Taiwan did not use to keep family genealogy. The existing genealogy material were preserved by immigrants from China, however, it needs further examination.

There is no written language among tribes of aboriginals in Taiwan, so as communicable devices between aborigines and Chinese (Amoy) language. During Japanese Occupation period, local people were requested to register family records by Japanese Kanzi (originally from Chinese) and/or Chinese characters to be their family names. Aborigines could only ask

help from available Chinese (Han people) to document their family names using Chinese characters. Thus, errors occurred during that time, many recorded as “Parents “Missing or “no available and so on.

Inter-racial marriages occurred, thereafter, mixed blood decedents existed. However, father is the leader of the family, so as father’s name was registered as the name of the family according to Chinese tradition. Therefore names of mother were lost. Further to that, before year of 1874, Ching Dynasty government banned people from Mainland China to immigrate to Taiwan, forbid land development and land trade, and inter-racial marriage with aborigines. Those immigrants had to borrow Chinese family names from others to do land trade, expand family size and legalize inter-racial marriage, such as change names of aborigines into Chinese family names. This regulation was stopped until 1875 (A condensed version of the Taiwanese People’s Origin, 2016).

Dr. Ma-Li Lin of Mackey Hospital did a research to reveal blood system of Taiwan’s people via (HLA), but was in vain conclude due to uncertainty of the foundation. At the current status, it has become a fighting tool among political parties. With regret that the clarification of blood system of Taiwan was not clear and thus not available to provide scientific evidence of Taiwan genealogical system (Yap, 2015).

(2) Shrine board of Ancestors

Shrine Board of Ancestors represent ancestors and for praying from decedents. Usually placed in individual family. Written characters are names of the late ancestor, usually one – the man, or two – the couple’s name. Some also add the birthdate and expiry date of the ancestors. Some families put more generations of ancestors together and named “previous ancestors”. This is not helpful when seeking information of genealogical and family history of particular family.

Fig. 2 Shrine Board of Ancestors of Author Yeh's Family



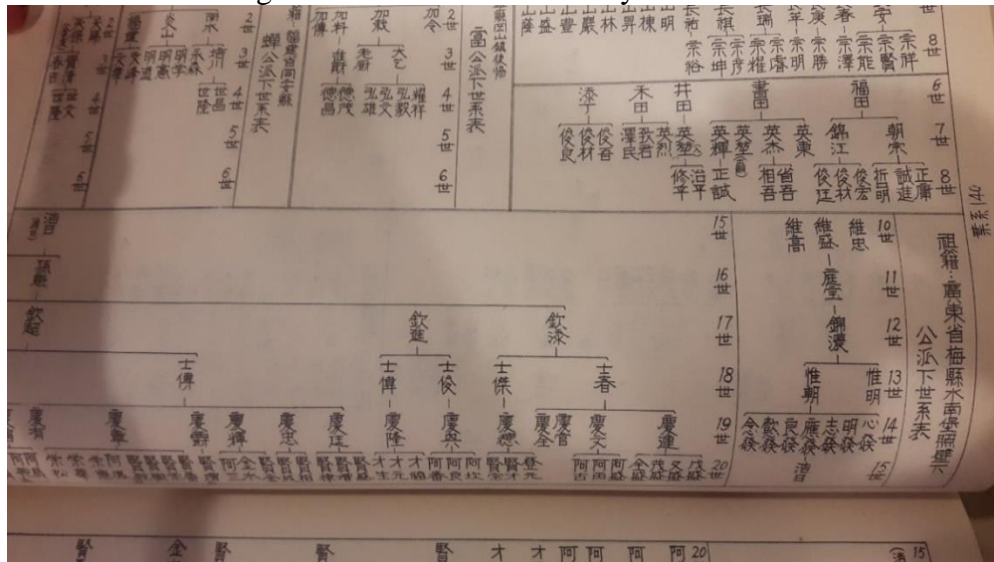
(3) Author Dr. Yeh's Family Records

The collection of Dr. Yeh's family records started writing and editing in 1965. More than half century, Dr. Yeh found records of own father, grandfather, and great grandmother, as figure 3. It is showed Grandfather as the leader, whose original place, occupation, specialty, names of sun and daughter in law. The information revealed that the family originated from Mai Country of Guantong Province, Tracing back the genealogical system, as Figure 4 showed, it did not show the information of the ancestors. The information disconnected and no way to check it if it is correct.

Fig. 3 Author Dr. Yeh's Family Records I



Fig. 4 Author Dr. Yeh's Family Records II



Conclusion

This paper tried to find out the current status of genealogy and local history collection, discuss problems of collection development of genealogy and family history. Authors found out that the limited collection of genealogy and family history available. There is a path of collection from “Later Day Saint Movement” did collection of genealogy and family history for the purpose of receiving baptism and blessings. The search of family history from the author, the limited information could only show name and residence, the correctness is not certain. The role of mothers are weak on the family history records. The nuclear family is the majority type at the current time, therefore tradition of keeping family history records is fading. The gap between upper generation and descendants become wider. To build, collect and collect genealogical family history is a great work and needs big and continuous financial support. It is difficult to resume the activities from individual family and public agencies.

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