

## Westward Moving History of Hubei Provincial library During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and Re-Walking the History in the Library's 111 Years Old

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### **Abstract:**

*Hubei Provincial Library, founded in 1904, is the earliest provincial public library in modern China. In the 1930s, the Japanese imperialists launched the war of aggression against China, and carried out indiscriminate destruction and trampling on the territory and resources of China, as well as cultural facilities and resources. The libraries were no exception.*

*In July 1938, the Hubei Provincial Library moved westward from capital city Wuhan to a small mountain town Enshi, to protect the cultural classics. Over 98000 volumes of library collection including more than 3000 rare books, and more than 9000 national famous ancient book plates were moved to Enshi.*

*In 1946, the Library returned to Wuhan, with the collection of over 98000 volumes increasing to over 110000 volumes, through the donation of volumes by some great scholars. These books laid a solid foundation for the comprehensive restoration of the library undertaking in Hubei Province. According to post-war statistics, only 944 volumes of books were lost or damaged during the Westward Moving. The Library is one of the least lost libraries during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.*

*In China and even in the history of library development in the world, this is rare. The Westward Moving of the Library made great contribution to Hubei culture preservation and protection. To some extent, the experience of the Library with the actions taken to preserve its treasures and collections has become a symbol of disasters experienced by Chinese libraries during the War.*

*This paper introduces the Westward Moving history of Hubei Provincial library systematically, showing the great patriotism and spirit presented by the older generation of Chinese library people in their responsibility to defend territory and preserve culture, stimulating contemporary library workers to further protect, explore, and make the most of rare books and collection.*

**Keywords:** Westward Moving Hubei Provincial library Rare Books Collection and Preservation Re-walking and Reviving

### 1. Background

In the 1930s, the Japanese imperialists launched the war of aggression against China, and carried out indiscriminate destruction and trampling on the territory and resources of the country, as well as cultural facilities and cultural resources. The libraries were no exception.

Hubei Provincial Library, founded in 1904, is the earliest provincial public library in modern China. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1938, when the Japanese army was approaching Wuhan, capital city of Hubei Province, Hubei Provincial Library which was just rebuilt a year and a half prior was ordered to move west, from Wuhan to Yichang, Zigui, Xingshan, Baodong, finally arriving in Enshi, a small border mountain town in the west of Hubei. This moving aimed to protect the essence of Hubei culture during the war, continue library's service for the people during the war and lay a foundation for the comprehensive restoration of the library undertaking in Hubei Province.



In 1938, the library was ordered to move to the west

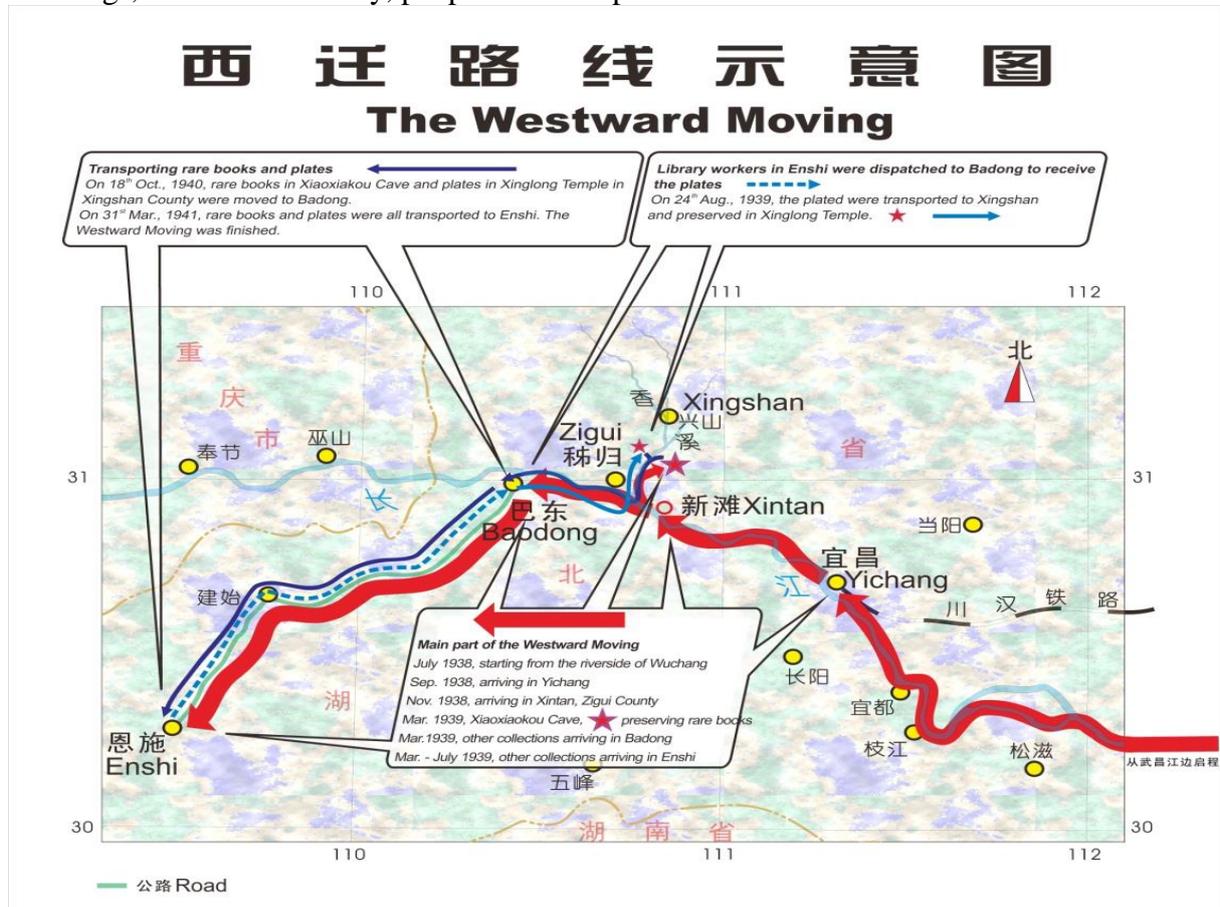
## 2. The Westward Moving

### 2.1 The collection

Over 98000 volumes of library collection (with more than 3000 rare books) and more than 9000 national famous ancient book plates were packed, totalling about 36 tons.<sup>1</sup>

In 1938, all the stations and terminals in Wuhan were stacked with mountains of transported materials and Hubei Provincial Library had not yet been included in the withdrawal sequence. Mr Tan Xi'en, Librarian of the Library at that time, had to make the most of his private relations in Ministry of Education and the provincial government, and finally caught the last boat to move west in the beginning of July. The collection was then firstly moved to Yichang in three batches from July to September in 1938. Due to the frequent battles and bombings in Yichang, the collection had to be transported further west without opening to the public. Then the collection, with the help of Minsheng Company —the largest private shipping company of Yangtze River route before 1949— was transported to Xintan Town, Zigui County in November 1938. From March to July in 1939, a large number of books were shipped to Badong County and finally arrived in Enshi City for the opening to the public; while the

precious rare books and ancient book plates, with the aim to avoid damage during the war, were stored in Xiaoxiakou cave and Xinglong Temple at the junction of Zigui County and Xingshan County. In March 1941, those rare books and ancient book plates were transported to Enshi City.<sup>iii</sup>It is recorded that it took a long time to transport the collection due to frequent bombings, and lack of money, people and transportation.



The Westward Moving Route

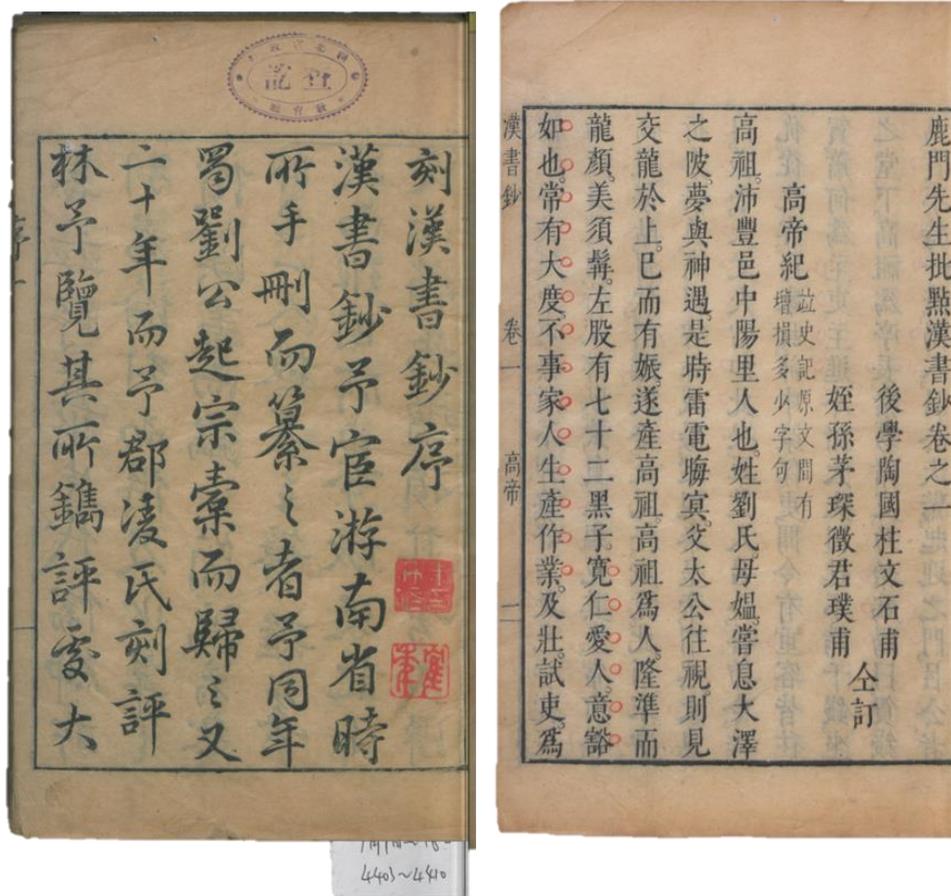
## 2.2 Protection and preservation

Firstly, the books were stored in wood boxes lined with iron sheet to prevent damage and water stains during the Westward Moving.

Secondly, the caves were mostly moist, and the library staff always found out secret and dry caves to store the ancient books. They placed cobblestones on the dry surface, and then planks on the stones to put the ancient books. They regularly opened the boxes to expose the rare books to the blazing sun for quite a long time.

Thirdly, mothballs were hard to find at that time, so the library staff put smashed dry tobacco leaves among every page to avoid damage by worms.

Fourthly, two members of library staff guarded those rare books every day to prevent loss by theft.<sup>iii</sup>



The rare books of Ming dynasty (1368-1644) during the Westward Moving

### 2.3 Serving the public

Moving west was definitely not a negative withdrawal, but the best way to protect the cultural classics and serve the public as much as it can be. Hubei Provincial Library, in spite of fierce battles and lack of resources, always did its best to make the books available to the public and provide service to the people.

In 1939, the temporary library site in Du's Ancestral temple, received more than one hundred readers every day for almost one year.<sup>iv</sup>

Also starting from 1939, the library was located in many temporary sites in Enshi to provide service for local residents, provincial administrations and schools and colleges that moved to Enshi.

In April 1940, a new building of Hubei Provincial Library was completed in Enshi and opened to the public. The Library inspired a wave of reading through its various public services to individuals, institutions and organizations. It is recorded that the library received readers more than 20,000 times every year since its establishment in Enshi, and over 25,000 receptions in 1944. Apart from providing reading service, the library provided reference and consulting services, guidance on library construction in counties and provincial administrations, and various lectures, which played a very important role in forming cultural atmosphere in west Hubei and in continuous development of cultural and educational work during the war.<sup>v</sup>

### 3. Back to Wuhan

In August 1945, China won the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. From May to August in 1946, Hubei Provincial Library moved back from Enshi to Wuhan, with the collection of over 98000 volumes increasing to over 110000 volumes, as a result of the donation of works by great scholars such as Mr Yang Shoujing and Zhang Jixu etc. These books laid a solid foundation for the comprehensive restoration of the library undertaking in Hubei Province. According to the statistics after the war, only 944 volumes of books were lost or damaged during the Westward Moving. Hubei Provincial Library is one of the least lost libraries during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. This may be rare, both in China and even in the history of library development in the world.<sup>vi</sup>

### 4. Significance

The impact of the war in China was extremely difficult to estimate. In November 1946, the Chinese delegation submitted to the Paris Conference of UNESCO material that said that “there were 1848 libraries in China before the war; however, the library business was affected the most, or was destroyed or plundered during the war.....Over 50% libraries in China had to be stopped or destroyed due to the War, with the surviving libraries losing a lot of collection. According to the statistics in 1943, the country has only 940 libraries survived although through the gradual renewing, about 50.86% of that before the war”.<sup>vii</sup> According to the statistics in the book *Big Catastrophe*, 2118 libraries were destroyed in enemy-occupied area and war zone, and more than 10 million collected books were destroyed during the war.<sup>viii</sup>

Firstly, to some extent, the Hubei Provincial Library not only represented all the disastrous experiences of Chinese libraries during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, but also showed the firm belief and miracle of completely protecting its culture. It wrote a glorious chapter in preservation of human cultural heritage, which reflected the hidden historical details and the spirit of the times.

Secondly, for the library itself, the Westward Moving made great contribution to the preservation and protection of Hubei culture, which laid a solid foundation for the comprehensive restoration of the library undertaking in Hubei Province.

Thirdly, for library staff, the library pioneers represent a group of people who stood up to shoulder the responsibility, in the face of flames and humiliation, of protecting national territory and culture during the War. They established a benchmark for library staff of the current generation, through experiencing the Westward Moving spirit to rediscover the confidence and awe that library pioneers have inspired.

### 5. Re-walking

In 2015, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese people's anti-Japanese war and the world anti-fascist war, Mr Tang Xuyan, Librarian of Hubei Provincial Library, lead a group to re-walk the Westward Moving history, researching the historical details hidden after the great changes of the rising of People's Republic of China and touching the precious history of protection in times of tribulation. The writer was the youngest one among them.

Many decades later, new China's rapid development has made great changes to the appearance of the landscape. Many historical trails cannot be found anymore, but some trails were still uncovered on the way.

In 1938, Jiumatou Wharf in Yichang was extremely busy and packed with mountains of materials—including the collection of Hubei Provincial Library—waiting to be transported, while in 2015 the wharf was spacious and tranquil under the moonlight. However, Yichang Retreat Monument on the wharf records the detailed retreat history during the war. The Librarian of Yichang Library also told us the story passed down from generation to generation.

In 1939, the library set a temporary site in Du's Ancestral Temple, open to the local villagers and children. The construction of the Three Gorges Dam project has caused the Changjiang River water level line raised more than 100 meters, and the ancestral site is now buried in the rolling river. Fortunately, the government relocated the structure of the Du's ancestral hall in the new Zigui County before the construction of Three Gorges Dam project, so it was possible to experience its white walls and black tiles, high walls shaped with horse head on the top, and simple and plain house structure, which was a typical Ming and Qing architecture.

From 1939 to 1941, Xiaohekou Cave and Xinglong Temple at the junction of Zigui County and Xingshan County was a perfect place to store the precious rare books and ancient book plates, due to its secret location to avoid bombings. These two sites were also buried in Changjiang River. However, with the help of a *Westward Moving Diary* written at that time and the memory of the local residents, we found the location of the two sites, imagining the cave and the temple more than 100 meters under the water level.



A map to describe the location of Xiaohekou Cave during the Westward Moving

During the 7 years in Enshi City, the library changed sites several times and was finally situated in Wuyangba. After Hubei Provincial Library moved back to Wuhan, the last site in

Enshi became the Enshi Library. When we arrived there, we could not find the old site due to the reconstruction of a new library building in 1980s, only some photos and words left for later generations. In addition, with the guidance of the Librarian of Enshi Library, we found a Chushui cave that was said to preserve the precious rare books and ancient book plates in Enshi decades ago.

It is worth mentioning that many great persons contributed to the success of the Westward Moving. The most important one was Mr Tan Xi'en, Librarian of Hubei Provincial Library at that time. Mr Tan, born in Xingshan County, studied abroad when he was young and came back to China to serve in Ministry of Education and served as president of Wuchang Senior Normal School, the predecessor of Wuhan University. He was one of the greatest masters in education and culture in Hubei, and was famous for his personality and integrity. During his Librarianship of Hubei Provincial Library, he successfully organized the Westward Moving when he was 65 years old, leading a special cultural fight in the war.<sup>ix</sup> We can now still imagine the difficulty for him to complete this great task. He died at 77 and was buried in his hometown—Xianshui village, Xingshan County. We were also honoured to worship the great Librarian at his tomb.

## 6. Reviving the History

In September 2013, Mr Sun Weicheng, film director of Hubei Provincial Library started to film *Westward Moving Documentary*. After almost two years of effort to find historic sites, check the route, talk with experts and descendants of the key people involved in the Westward Moving, and discover other relevant resources, Mr Sun, together with his excellent team, finally finished the documentary after many times travelling between Wuhan, Yichang, Zigui, Xingshan, Badong and Enshi. The documentary then was awarded as the first prize of Hubei Educational Film for CPC Members, and the second prize of Chinese Educational Film for CPC Members.

In May 2015, Librarian Mr Tang Xuyan led a group to re-walk the historic trail.

In July 2015, the *Information & Library Tribune* issued a special journal, with totally 10 papers written by the Westward Moving re-walking group and many precious pictures on the Westward Moving and re-walking the trail, covering the Westward Moving report, key people in the Westward Moving, significance of the Westward Moving and re-walking, a re-walking diary, reflection on the Westward Moving etc.

In August 2015, all the library staff were treated to a screening of *Westward Moving Documentary* and invited to study the special journal of the Westward Moving. Afterwards, the library announced a competition, calling for papers on the topic of the Westward Moving. The winners were praised and organized to re-walk the historic trail. All the participants were deeply touched by the experience.

Till then, the period of reviving the history of the Westward Moving temporarily came to an end. The history becomes the past, while the memory and spirit will last forever.

## Acknowledgments

I'm grateful to the many people who contributed to the success of the Westward Moving and re-walking the history.

This paper cannot be written without the detailed research of historic materials by my teammates of re-walking the trail in 2015. They are Librarian Mr. Tang Xuyan, Mr. Yan Jidong, director of Librarian Office, Mr. Xia Changming, director of Education and Training Department, Ms Dai Bo, director of Reference Department, Mr. Qi Zhengjun, deputy director of Librarian Office, Mr Ma Zhili, deputy director of Rare Books and Special Collections Department, and Mr Sun Weicheng, film director of Hubei Provincial Library. Also, special thanks are given to Ms Ye Li who made a careful editorship of the special journal of Westward Moving.

I'm also indebted to Ms Lone Keast, Executive Manager, Partnerships of State Library of Queensland who was invited to be my first English reader and helped me correct some grammar and expression mistakes.

I'm blessed to be surrounded by wonderful leaders such as librarian Mr He Ding'an, and Ms. Hao Min, director of my department. The paper would not have been able to have the opportunity to be read in the session of 2017 IFLA without their great support.

The boundless support of my family has always been the foundation of my life. I finished the whole process of preparing and writing this paper and preparing for the presentation during my pregnancy. I get a lot of love and support from my family and also my lovely baby in my tummy.

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