

## Public Library and Folk Historical Document: Taking Wenzhou Library as an example

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### Abstract:

*In 2012, Wenzhou Library organized a folk historical documents collection project for compiling History of Wenzhou. Due to the great support of Wenzhou Government, the hard-work of teachers and students from historical departments of universities and some volunteers in Wenzhou, the project was greatly fruitful. This paper will present the background, processing, achievements and the importance of this project. Meanwhile, it will talk about the role which Wenzhou Library played in this project.*

**Keywords:** History, Regional collection, genealogy, manuscripts, encyclopedia

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### Background to the Folk Historical Documents Collection Project

As an important project in the cultural development of Wenzhou, the compiling work of general *History of Wenzhou* was approved in 2010. It will help Wenzhou to become a historically and culturally celebrated city of China. The *General History of Wenzhou*, which is the first officially compiled history of Wenzhou in the past 6,000 years, which is from prehistory times to the founding of the People's Republic of China. According to Professor Wu Songdi, who is the chief editor, the General History of Wenzhou will include about three million words, which is divided into seven volumes, namely, introduction volume, East Ou empire volume, Han and Tang dynasties volume, Song and Yuan dynasties volume, Ming dynasty volume, Qing dynasty volume and Republic of China volume. In the mean time, we will compile 30 volumes of special topic history about Wenzhou, such as ethnics, customs, salt economy, architecture, dialect, Chinese folk arts. The traditional history books were compiled on basis of official documents that were always stored in libraries, museums and archives. They only reflect the upper class lives. As a reflection of Wenzhou local characteristics, *General History of Wenzhou* will fully explore folk materials; pay more attention to the history of the underclass. Thus, it will show the cultural specialty of Wenzhou. The related Wenzhou government departments give us much assistance to the compiling work. Wu Dong, the director of Wenzhou Culture Bureau, thought that the compiling work encounters a lot of difficulties because of insufficient archaeological materials, historical relics and foundational historical research. One of the difficulties is in finding clues and collecting related materials. It needs support of the whole society. To motive social strength to the success of compiling, the Wenzhou Government issued a document in July 2011, which asked compilers to make full use of modern technical instruments to collect, organize, store materials, and promote the digitalization of the compiling work. Related departments

should help compilers to get access to photocopy materials. Therefore, a large scale of historical documents collection in Wenzhou was organized last summer. There are three important meanings:

- (1) Systematically collect historical materials about Wenzhou which are stored in folk society and share with future generations;
- (2) Provide the further understanding of charm of the past;
- (3) Help the academic research on economic and social history, historical geography, ethnology and micro-history.

### **The field research**

As it proceeds, the compiling team adopts the field research in rural areas (e.g. Yongjia, Yueqing, Dongtou, Wencheng, Ruian, Pingyang, Cangnan, Taishun etc.) to collect a lot of local documents. The collected local documents include family trees, written contracts, handbooks of religious rites, tablet inscriptions, scripts of a ballad singing, daily miscellaneous books, dairies, letters, lawsuit paper, rare books, handbooks of medical prescription, ancient travel guide and so on. Additionally, collecting dictated data is considered as an effective supplement of Wenzhou local historical material.

Field research is the main method to collect local documents. In June 2012, Wenzhou Library and the Center for Research on Local Historical Documents of Xiamen University have worked together to write *The Regulation and Process for Local Historical Documents*, which is divided into four parts. In the first part, it briefly introduced the academic worth of local historical documents and the three collection processes including gathering, compilation of catalogue, and digitalization. The second part is all about preparation. Before collection starts, we need to prepare tools such as camera, voice recording equipment, tape line, etc. Meanwhile, one should have some acquaintance with the historical background of the region from libraries, Chorography Bureau, Placename Bureau, Culture and History Commission, relics protection departments, archives and other institutions. Related governmental departments should invite some elderly and professors who work on local culture and history to help investigators' better understanding of folk history. The third part is about how to collect documents including family trees, written contracts, handbooks of religious rites and tablet inscriptions via investigation, collection and recording. The fourth part is to reorganize the catalogues which will be mainly completed in Wenzhou Library. Collectors need to establish classification system, cataloguing principles and literature systems in accordance with each village.

Oral history collection is mainly conducted under the direction of Li Shizhong, a teacher at East China Normal University. He edited *Oral History Work Handbook*. The oral history collection is expected to supplement local Wenzhou history, especially strengthen people's understanding of local market systems, administration systems and religion systems. The related topics are about regional belief, clan and village, the changes of ruling systems, interrelation and exchange, internal and external events and major memory. Interviewees are very important for reliability of what they tell. Therefore, five or six senior citizens, who once worked at culture or history departments and whose memory is still sound, should be chosen and interviewed respectively. Generally speaking, the interview should concern about migration, clan development, living of ancestors, the compiling of family trees, local customs and so on. Possibly, we may go to the ancestral halls, temples, inscription tablets and relics of water conservancy project to have field investigation.

Through collecting literal and oral materials, investigators would have a general understanding of local history. Then they should compare their understanding with written materials such as local chorography and official documents and get a more in-depth understanding.

### **Achievements and Value**

The collection of folk documents proceeded from 28th June to 31st August 2012. We collected 1,679 volumes of genealogies, 536 pages of literal contracts, 220 volumes religious ritual books, 1 volume of libretto, 2 pages of imperial edict (one of them, dating back Chinghua years, Ming dynasty, is now

stored in Datamen village, Yueqing City, the other is a photocopy of an edict which is now stored in the National Palace Museum in Taipei) and some inscribed stones. Clearly, genealogies are the most common and well-stored, which record families' migration, development, as well as prosperity and decline. What's more, they depict the social development, politics and economy at that time.

People in Wenzhou have the custom to compile genealogies and some clans have compiled their genealogy many times. Up to now, 1679 volumes have been collected, which describe society, customs, ethnics, economy, politics, geology and the living of overseas Chinese in the past. They can be an improvement and supplement for Wenzhou history.

### *1 · Distributions*

According to administration division, among the 1679 volumes genealogies, 390 volumes belong to Yueqing, 423 volumes belong to Rui'an, 215 volumes belong to Yongjia, 219 volumes belong to Pingyang, 134 volumes belong to Cang'nan, 47 volumes belong to Taishun, 17 volumes belong to Wencheng, 23 volumes belong to Dongtou, 111 volumes belong to Longwan, 100 volumes belong to Ou Hai. More specifically, most genealogies belong to the littoral regions, such as Yueqing, Rui'an, Pingyang, Cang'nan, while mountainous areas, such as Taishun, Wencheng, because of constraints of geology and transportation, kept fewer. Beyond our expectation, a lot of genealogies have been collected less than a month. It reminds us that the most genealogies in Wenzhou were stored among people, which are different from the northern part and the middle part of Zhejiang Province, where genealogies were mainly stored in governmental organization. Thus, we need to have more investigation in local Wenzhou to collect more genealogies.

### *2. Age*

None of these genealogies dates back to Yuan dynasty or earlier. The earliest one is the Xue Clan genealogy in Rui'an County, which dated back to Wanli Years in Ming dynasty. It is a pity that we only collect its copy edition, not the original manuscript, because the Xue family wants to better store it. Most of its content is about the record of lineage. It records in detail from the fifth generation Zhengqinggong and his younger brothers to the twenty-fourth generation Xue Jizhi and Xue jishan, including family name, bynames, birth dates, wives' names, people's merits and careers. It ended in Jiajing Years, Ming dynasty which means that it was indeed compiled in Wanli Years, Ming dynasty.

113 volumes of these genealogies dated back to Qing dynasty (details in chart below). The earliest one is the Chen clan genealogy, stored in Fangxia village, Jinxiang Town, Cangnan County, which was compiled in Kangxi Years, Qing dynasty. There are two genealogies dated back to Qianlong Years, Qing dynasty. The one compiled in Qianlong fifty-ninth Year, Qing dynasty is from Ji clan in Tatoudi village, Yayang Town, Taishun County. The other one dated back to Qianlong Years in Qing dynasty is from Chen clan in Lou'ao village, Puqi Town, Yueqing City. Noticeably, though some footers were gnawed, the Chen genealogy, with kraft paper cover, is a well-preserved manuscript written on rice paper and can still be read. It contains two preludes, one written by the thirteenth generation Sun Kaifang and the fourteenth generation Sun Xiulong in Qianlong Years, the other, named *Prelude to the Sequel Genealogy*, was written by the last generation Xiulong. Genealogies that were compiled after Qianlong Years were compiled mainly from Daoguang to Guangxu Years. 301 volumes of genealogies were compiled in years of Republic of China, which were mainly distributed in Pingyang, Rui'an, Yueqing, Cangnan and Yongjia. 1202 volumes genealogies were compiled after the founding of the People's Republic of China. Even between 1950s and 1970s, when many genealogies in China were destroyed in political campaigns, there were still many genealogies compiled in Wenzhou. Obviously, even after the Founding of the New China, the Wenzhou people still pay much importance to the compilation of family trees.

Location Dynasty	Ming dynasty	Qing dynasty	Republic of China	People's Republic of China	Uncert ain
Yueqing		31	106	251	2
Rui'an	1(Wa nli Years)	23	68	319	13
Yongjia		5	20	173	17
Pingyang		23	38	156	2
Cang'nan		13	23	97	1
Taishun		8	6	33	
Wencheng		1	9	7	
Longwan		8	17	83	3
Ouhai		1	13	61	25
Dongtou			1	22	

Chart 1. The age of genealogies collected in summer of 2012

### 3. The value of genealogies

(1) As a supplement. Genealogies record the course of clan's development and change. Their content is original and successive and cannot be found in other kind of historical documents, especially officially compiled chorography. So genealogies have their own particular value as material resources.

(2) As an amendment. Official historical materials, which were formed in varied periods inevitably, contained some mistakes due to knowledge limitation. So it is necessary to discriminate them. Genealogies, as first-hand material, can be used as important references to correct mistakes in official documents.

(3) As a detailed description. The *General History of Wenzhou* needs comprehensive materials. But some of them are roughly contained in published documents, seldom recorded in detail. The genealogies we have collected contain abundant contents, including lineage, clan origins, edicts, Zipai (words represent generational difference), family precepts, clan principles, honour, official career, election, education, biographies, inscriptions, liturgies, Shouwen (congratulations for a senior citizen's birthday), testaments and couplets. Those documents contain more detailed historical information than any other materials. It reveals some aspects of the historical development in one region at a time and a vivid panorama of the past.

(4) As a complement. Many figures and stories recorded by genealogies, which are not so important to be officially recorded, play a significant role in the prosperity and development of a specific region. Thus, it is necessary to reorganize the development of a region and research on figures recorded in genealogies.

### Inspirations

Because of the unique cultural and natural landscape in Wenzhou, a large amount of historical documents, being stored in folk society, bring a lot of difficulties to collection and preservation. Moreover, people don't attach much importance to the protection and inheritance of historical documents. Many of them, being corrosive, worm-eaten and water-damaged, are of less historic value. Great deals of historical documents are in danger of dying off in the shock of the tide of marketing economy and several political campaigns because of their lack of economic benefits.

In January 2012, Wenzhou Library held a meeting in Ouhai District, Wenzhou, which was also a start-up ceremony of the collection of folk documents. The work-team consists of teachers and

students from Fudan University, Xiamen University and librarians from Wenzhou Library. They took many field surveys, made inquiries and took photos to collect useful materials. As a result, there are about 604 volumes of genealogies, 53 pieces of inscriptions, 360 pages of literal contracts, 352 pages of handbooks for religious ritual. Additionally, a lot of archives from villages, many old photos and recorded tapes were collected. On the basis of achievements in January, folk documents collection in summer was carried out in a larger scale.

Traditionally speaking, folk documents collection is a main function of a library, and Wenzhou library is considered as an organizer in this project. It has done abundant preparation including volunteers recruiting, contacting with some related departments, accommodation and transportation for interviewers and so on. Furthermore, it also provided places to some volunteers for compilation. All the above has been a great enlightenment.

### *1. Support of the government.*

Thanks to the Wenzhou Government and related departments' support, the folk documents collection has proceeded successfully. During the process, town governments help to convene the elders and people who have worked in cultural and historical departments to take part in. Additionally, we have worked with local guides because the folk historical documents were widely dispersed as well as we encounter linguistic differences. As a significant opportunity for documents collection, during the compilation, it is necessary to encourage the citizens to bring folk documents to libraries for preservation, either in original versions or copies.

### *2. Participation of teachers and students*

Collecting folk historical documents, including oral historical materials, is an important research approach which requires some professional trainings. An instruction handbook, which was specially edited by Wenzhou Library, Folk Historical Documents Research Center in Xiamen University and modern Wenzhou Local Society Research Group of East China Normal University, has greatly facilitated our collection work. During the process of oral history collection, there are two or three members in one group, including a doctoral student, graduate students, and undergraduate students. Therefore, the collection can be carried out successfully. We hope, in future, that we could recruit some volunteers as professional as these teachers and students. It is necessary to provide trainings for librarians, and people who have basic knowledge about documents collection.

### *3. Volunteers*

Up to now, we have recruited 70 volunteers from Wenzhou Vocational and Technical College who have played an important role in taking photos, compiling the catalogues and information collection. Most of them, who are Wenzhouese, are able to communicate with the local elderly. Tedious as their job is, it has greatly improved the whole process. Undoubtedly, we should establish a group of volunteers for the collections.

### *4. Love for the hometown*

We are warmly welcomed by the local when we arrive, partly because town governments have made some previous introduction, but more important, they love their hometown and were glad to share their stories, which make them proud.

### *5. Cooperation; digitalization; share*

Wenzhou Library should cooperate with other libraries, establish Wenzhou folk historical documents databases as a main part of digitalization. In conclusion, the collected data that definitely enrich special and virtual collection of Wenzhou Library is continuously digitized and put online. Besides, it

will further promote people's understanding of their cities and towns as well as provide an efficient way for better cultural exchange.

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