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CHINESE LOCAL GAZETTEERS: EVOLUTION, INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND DIGITIZATION¹

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Abstract

The past three decades have witnessed great changes and developments in the publishing industry in China. One important change is that more and more new local gazetteers (or local histories) and yearbooks are compiled and published in book format. Local gazetteers and yearbooks are also increasingly available in electronic format through commercial databases or as is less known, in public domain. The purpose of this article is to address the following questions: What are new local gazetteers and yearbooks? Why so many titles are published now? Are there any free online full texts available? What are the free online full texts? In addition, I will briefly examine the institutionalization of compiling and publishing local gazetteers and yearbooks in China. Furthermore, I present the result of a survey on freely available online full texts of such materials that I conducted from 2007 through 2008. Given that commercial full-text databases of local gazetteers are unaffordable for most libraries in North America, it is hoped that students, researchers and librarians of Chinese studies shall find the free online full-text materials useful.

Introduction

The local gazetteer, *difang zhi*, is considered one of the most important source materials for studying China. Writing and publishing local gazetteers in China has a long history. More often than not, the state took an active role in creating and producing local gazetteers. Similarly, the current Chinese government is largely responsible for the mass production of local gazetteers.

This article focuses on institutionalization of compiling and printing local gazetteers, particularly in recent years. National institutions at different administrative levels provide relatively adequate political, human and financial resources for compiling and publishing local gazetteers and yearbooks. The National Directorate for Local Gazetteers (*Quanguo difang zhi zhidao xiaozu*) at the national level directs offices or departments at provincial, city, and county level. The local gazetteer office or department serves as a regular government unit, responsible for the compilation and publishing of local gazetteers and yearbooks at its administrative level. A new Chinese statute law stipulates that the local gazetteer should be published on a regular basis of every 20 years.

This article also focuses on digitization efforts by the current Chinese government, particularly by local governments, in creating databases of a great number of local gazetteers and yearbooks. Though national systematic digitization of new local gazetteers has not yet taken shape, many local governments, particularly those at provincial and city level, have made great efforts in digitizing local gazetteer catalogs and texts and making them available online to interested researchers to use for free. This article presents the results of a survey on such online materials and examines their digitization status.

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Evolution

The earliest local gazetteer can be traced back to the Warring States Period (B.C. 475-B.C. 221). However, it was not until the Sui Dynasty (581-618) that the imperial government got involved directly. The Sui government ordered the compilation, printing, and submission of printed local gazetteers. Local gazetteers then largely consisted of local maps annotated with informative texts on customs and products for the sake of governance and taxation. The standard local gazetteers took shape in the second half of the Song Dynasty (960-1127), during which the major topics for contents to be compiled and the major categories for materials to be arranged were finalized and standardized. Yet, few titles of local gazetteers from the Song Dynasty or earlier have survived to the present time. In dynastic China, the development of local gazetteers reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) with about 6,500 titles compiled (Lai, 2002, pp. 274-279). It is believed that about 90 percent of extant local gazetteers before 1949 were published during the Qing Dynasty (Wilkinson, 1998, p. 156). The major reason for the unprecedented development of local gazetteers in Qing Dynasty was that, among others, the Qing emperors directly ordered the compilation and printing of local gazetteers and attempted to institutionalize the compilation and publishing. The turbulent, short-lived Republican period of China (1911-1949) was not as productive in creating and updating local gazetteers as its predecessor and successor. However, the Republican government, like its predecessor the Qing Dynasty, repeatedly issued statutes for provincial, city and county governments to compile and print local gazetteers on a regular basis (Ba, 2004, pp.168-203).

It is roughly estimated that, in the holdings mainland Chinese libraries, there are only three pre-Song titles, 28 Song titles, 942 Ming titles, 4,889 Qing titles, and 1,187 Republican titles. The total number of pre-1949 traditional local gazetteers is 7,058 (Huang & Zhu, 1990, p. 136). In the United States, several research libraries such as the Library of Congress, Harvard-Yenching Library, University of Chicago and Columbia University are known for their important collections of traditional local gazetteers compiled and published before 1949.

After 1949, though a few local gazetteers were published in 1950s and the 1960s, because of constant sociopolitical movements, the compilation and publishing of local gazetteers were largely suspended until the late 1970s. Large scale production did not appear until the 1980s. Back in 1958, the National Directorate for Local Gazetteers was established, but the office was discontinued and few publications were produced because the whole nation was soon engulfed by the Great Leap Forward, a radical and catastrophic industrialization movement during 1958-1960.

When the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was over and China started to reform and open up to the outside world in the late 1970s, the tradition of compiling and publishing local gazetteers was resurrected. While it is generally stated that compilation and publication of local gazetteers began in 1949, in reality few were compiled and published before the end of the Cultural Revolution. Compared to the production after 1970s, the number of local gazetteers produced between 1949 and the late 1970s was insignificant and the compilation and publishing then was largely politicized. From the late 1970s through 2005, over 6,000 comprehensive local gazetteers were compiled, of which 5,000 or more were published as books. An additional 40,000 or more departmental, trade, town/township, and mountain/river gazetteers were published (ZDB, 2006). Such rapid development of new local gazetteers from the late 1970s mainly resulted from efforts of the Chinese government to institutionalize and standardize the compilation and publishing of local gazetteers.

Institutionalization

The Qing Dynasty and the Republican government attempted to institutionalize the compiling and publishing of local gazetteers. The government of new China since 1949, especially the current Chinese government, has ultimately made the greatest efforts toward compiling and publishing local gazetteers in a highly systematic and institutionalized way.

Following the Yuan (1260-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasty examples of compiling the nation's *Yitong zhi* (The Comprehensive Gazetteer of the country), the Qing compiled and published *Da Qing yitong zhi*

(The Comprehensive Gazetteer of the Great Qing). In 1673, Emperor Kangxi ordered the start of the project, and later he repeatedly ordered local gazetteers of provinces, prefectures and counties to be compiled, published and submitted. In 1687, the royal *Yitong zhi* Guan (Academy for Compiling the Comprehensive Gazetteer) was founded and staffed with senior scholar officials. Then, a great number of local gazetteers at different administrative levels were compiled, published, and submitted to the emperor. In 1720s, Emperor Yongzheng, Emperor Kangxi's son and successor, placed more emphasis on the producing of local gazetteers. He reorganized the academy to make it more efficient, ordered the local gazetteers completed previously to be revised and updated, and urged more new gazetteers to be compiled and printed. In 1730, he required province, prefecture and county gazetteers to be compiled and published every 60 years. He proposed that it would be a life-long profession for interested upright intellectuals to work on local gazetteers. It was not until 1744, the eighth year of the rule of Emperor Qianlong, who succeeded the Yongzheng emperor, that the *Yitong zhi* was finalized in 342-juan, carved into printing boards, and finally published. Over 20 years later, Emperor Qianlong ordered the *Yitong zhi* to be updated and revised, and the updating and revision were not completed until 1765. In 1802, the next emperor, Emperor Jiaqing ordered the revision of the updated *Yitong zhi* (Ba, 2004, pp.111-135). The third version was not completed until 1843 under Emperor Daoguan's rule.

With several emperors' ardent endorsement and direct involvement, it took 170 years for the comprehensive national gazetteer to be compiled and revised to its third version. During this long period, the format and style of local gazetteers became standardized, and the production of local gazetteers flourished at different administrative levels across China. Over 3,000 titles compiled and printed during this period are extant, indicating that many more titles were actually compiled and printed but did not survive. Local intellectuals as well as scholar officials were involved in the compiling and producing of local gazetteers. More often than not, the government relied on local gentry to compile and print local gazetteers. These intellectuals and local gentry collaborated with the state, but meanwhile, they sought after intellectual independence and pushed for local pride within the imperial limits. The combination of bureaucratic and governmental with local and gentry-centered concerns, and the often fruitful tension between them, makes the local gazetteer valuable historical resources (Hymes, 1996).

In the Republican Period, also thanks to the government's endorsement and repeated decrees, the compilation and publishing of local gazetteers went on despite multiple adversities such as civil wars and inadequate resources. In 1916, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior Affairs jointly ordered provincial and county governments to set up a department for the compiling of local gazetteers. In 1917, realizing the challenges in many regions, especially those regions that had suffered severely from wars, famine, or that lacked scholar compilers, the Ministry of Interior issued a circular specifying an adjustment to the policy to the effect that counties that had already set up the local gazetteer department and started the compilation should continue the work; counties that had not yet started the compilation should prepare to start first by extensively collecting relevant public and private materials and literature. Later, several more national level governmental departments got involved and required the creation, production, and submission of local gazetteers.

In 1928, one year after the Nationalist government was founded, the cabinet-like Executive Yuan ordered all provinces and counties to compile and submit local gazetteers. In 1929, the Executive Yuan released *Xiu zhi shili gaiyao* (Guidelines for Compiling Local Gazetteers) in order to standardize the compilation and the workflow. One year later, the Executive Yuan issued an order to require localities not to specially compile the gazetteer of the Nationalist Party, the ruling party. Soon the Sino-Japanese War broke out and largely disrupted local gazetteer compilation.

In 1944, one year before the war was over, the Ministry of Interior Affairs issued *Difang zhi shu zuanxiu banfa* (Methods for Compiling Local Gazetteers), stipulating that departments at province, city and county level be established for compiling local gazetteers; upon completion, the gazetteers should be submitted to the Ministry's review committee for evaluation; when approved and printed, the gazetteers should be deposited in several governmental departments. In 1946, the ministry updated the document *Methods for Compiling Local Gazetteers* and issued *Gesheng shi xian wenxian weiyuanhui zuzhi guizhang* (Stipulations on Establishing Literature Commission at Province, City and County Level), which offered guidelines on

collecting literature and materials for compiling local gazetteers. The 7-to-15-member commission should consist of the editorial group responsible for compiling and writing, the collection group responsible for collecting materials and conducting interview, the processing group responsible for processing and preserving collected materials, and the logistics group (Ba, 2004, 168-194).

These three statues of Republican government on local gazetteers outlined above provide detailed provisions concerning important aspects of local gazetteers, ranging from the organization, the requirements for book structure and contents, the review procedure, the language and authoring style, to the book printing. The government also ruled that the provincial gazetteer should be compiled every 30 years and the city or county gazetteer should be compiled in every 15 years. The end of Sino-Japan War in 1945 was soon followed by the civil war, which ended the Republican government in mainland China in 1949. It was estimated that as many as 950 local gazetteers were compiled and published during the Republican Period.

The Chinese government after 1949 could not put local gazetteer work in its agenda until the late 1950s when the National Leading Group for Local Gazetteers (*Quanguo difang zhi xiaozu*) was founded and reorganized. The Directorate issued several documents to guide the compilation of local gazetteers at commune, county, city and province level. Through the early 1960s, local governments set up hundreds of local gazetteer departments in order to focus on their compiling and the publishing. But, in those years of high politicization, only a very limited number of city, county and commune gazetteers were compiled and printed. Many gazetteers got no farther than strongly political, heavily propaganda draft versions. In August 1963, the CCP (China Communist Party) Department of Propaganda issued a circular entitled *Guanyu bianxie difang zhi gongzuo de jidian yijian* (Several Opinions on Compiling Local Gazetteers) and proposed a system of censorship to control the publishing and distribution. The guiding document prescribes that a draft of local gazetteer draft may not be printed for obtaining formal publishing approval until it has been reviewed and found problem-free both politically and in terms of national secrecy protection (Ba, 2004, pp. 203-238).

During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), local gazetteer work, like many other regular cultural and educational activities, was suspended. In the late 1970s following the end of the Cultural Revolution and in transition to the period of opening up and reform, compiling and publishing of local gazetteers gradually came back. In response, the central government offered a green light to such bottom-up initiatives. In 1980 and later, the central government issued circulars and orders to create a nationwide structure to direct and oversee compiling local gazetteers at different levels. In 1981 the China Local Gazetteers Association was founded, and soon it launched large-scale national training programs for staff working on local gazetteers. In 1983, the National Leading Group for Local Gazetteers was officially established for the second time, to take the responsibilities of planning and overseeing the compilation and publishing of local gazetteers at the county, city and province levels of the country (Xu, 2005; ZDB, 2006).

The Directorate released the “Provisional Guidelines on the New Compilation of Local Gazetteers” (*Xinbian defang zhi gongzuo zanxing guiding*) in 1985 in order to institutionalize and standardize the booming compilation and production of local gazetteers. This document was finalized in 1997 and was released as the official “Guidelines on Compiling Local Gazetteers” (*Guan yu defang zhi bianzuan gongzuo de guiding*) document in 1998. According to the provisions of the “Guidelines,” Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory must be the guiding principles; and administrative and editorial activities must be “led by the CCP committee and undertaken by the government.” Addressing technical issues, the document stipulates that a local gazetteer should be compiled and published once every 20 years; and the published local gazetteer should be appended by an index. Equally important, it is stipulated that the local gazetteer office should be a department directly affiliated to the corresponding government, and that it should be budgeted as a regular department. In the late 1990s, almost all governments at county level and above abided by this stipulation by opening and staffing their local gazetteer office, and many local gazetteers were compiled and published. The office was often headed by the top local government official leader. In some less developed areas, the office was shared with the Research Office of CCP History, as in the case of Tibetan Autonomous Region, or with the Academy of Social Science, as in the case of Shanxi Province.

Yet, though it was approved by the State Council, the Directorate-issued document of 1998 did not carry adequate weight as a statute issued directly from the State Council. In many regions, particularly less developed counties and cities, the local gazetteer department faced many problems, particularly inadequate budget and staff. The Directorate worked hard to pass a more preferential law.

In 2006, a document entitled the “Regulations on Local Gazetteer Work” (*Difang zhi gongzuo tiaoli*) was signed by Premier Wen Jiabao and issued directly by the State Council to replace the 1998 document (CSC, 2006). The successful enactment of this statute by the State Council is considered the most significant achievement of the Directorate in the attempt to institutionalize and standardize local gazetteer work. The law reiterated that the Directorate is responsible for planning, coordinating, and overseeing the compilation and publishing of local gazetteers at the provincial, city/prefecture, and county levels. Local gazetteers at the three levels are produced as the *guanxiu zhengshi* (government-compiled orthodox history). Thus, only the local government is responsible for compiling and publishing of local gazetteers; the local gazetteer department is to be adequately budgeted by the corresponding government and staffed with writers and editors whose qualifications should meet required professional standards; and proper review procedures must guarantee quality control (Xinghua, 2006).

The major changes in this law include the retirement of the strict political requirements outlined in the 1998 documents, the expansion of the concept of local gazetteer to include the comprehensive yearbook, the government’s mandate to budget for the operational costs related to local gazetteers, and the designation of copyright for the published gazetteers/yearbooks to the government rather than individual authors whose rights are limited only to being authors. The political requirements in the new law are not as strict as before, but it is clear that the local government is responsible for political correctness as well as budgetary and organizational adequacy. Previously, the compilation and publishing of comprehensive yearbooks lacked national management and coordination, while the new law makes the local gazetteer office also responsible for the making of comprehensive yearbooks. Furthermore, the law also requires the local gazetteer department to expand access to local gazetteers through digitization, such as creating databases and websites for public use.

Outside the network of the province, many local gazetteers and yearbooks for city districts, towns and townships, and villages are also produced, particularly in economically and culturally developed regions. In addition, local gazetteers and yearbooks on important mountains, rivers, and historical and cultural sites are produced.

It is estimated that from the late 1970s to the end of 2006, over 5,000 titles of the 6,000 planned local gazetteers at provincial, city and county level were published. About 40,000 titles of local gazetteers of departments, industries, towns and townships, rivers and mountains, etc. were published; and 645 titles of comprehensive yearbooks at province, city and county level were published (ZDB, 2006)

Digitization

The Directorate has realized the importance of digitization and is determined to pursue digitization projects. Back in 2003, the Directorate set up eight goals for its five-year term, one of which was to create a federated online network for its nationwide system. Substantial efforts have been made to realize the goals, but the goal of digitization is far from being realized (CNLGG, 2006). Much digitization effort, particularly website creation, has been carried out locally. A significant proportion of the websites are of poor quality (Zhang & Yang, 2005). Besides, there are multiple access issues, ranging from using an unpopular file format for digitized texts to registration requirement or password-protection. Seven province-level regions, namely, Chongqing, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xizang, Sichuan, Hainan and Jiangxi have not set up their province-level local gazetteer office websites offering any online full texts of local gazetteers or yearbooks, catalogs, or bibliographic records.

One of the most useful contributions in the area of digitization, however, is that a significant number provincial and city local gazetteer offices have developed online catalogs and full-text databases of local gazetteers and yearbooks. The websites of the local gazetteers offices of Shandong, Beijing, Shanghai,

Helongjiang, Jilin and several others represent good examples of searchable online databases of catalogs and full texts of local gazetteers and yearbooks. All the online resources are accessible for free. Some online catalogs include searchable catalogs and even link to full texts of ancient local gazetteers of high scholarly value.

The abstracts, catalogs and contents available at a number of websites of local gazetteer offices are relatively rich, and some yearbook databases include a complete run of yearbook publications of many consecutive years, some over 10 years. A pioneer in digitizing new local gazetteers and developing databases for public use, the Shandong Local Gazetteer Office started the construction of the Shandong Province Information Bank early in 1996. As of the end of 2005, the information bank had federated the databases of contents of local gazetteer and yearbooks from 16 cities and 68 counties. It was planned that by 2010 it would cover all 17 cities and 140 counties and districts of the province (ZDB, 2006).

The author conducted a survey on the status of free available local gazetteers and yearbooks in China from 2007, repeated it, and checked the collected data and corrected errors through 2008. This survey's focus was only on the online full-text contents of local gazetteer offices at provincial level. The survey result was finalized in summer 2009 (see Table 1). The list includes those websites and portals providing full text of local gazetteers and yearbooks. However, those sites offering bibliographic catalogs are also included because the catalogs are also useful to researchers. Generally speaking, most full texts are searchable and downloadable. It should be noted that many public libraries and university and college libraries also undertook certain useful digitization projects, with either online catalogs or full texts of their local gazetteers available (Mao, 2006).

Table 1. Websites of Local Gazetteer and Yearbooks with Full Texts by Province²

Province	Website Title	URL	Local Gazetteer	Yearbook	Note
Anhui	安徽地方志; 安徽省情网	http://www.ahdfz.gov.cn/	NA	NA	Searchable bibliographic records, abstracts
Beijing	北京市地方志编纂委员会办公室; 京网; 首都之窗	http://www.bjdfz.gov.cn/index.jsp	City and its 74 dept gazetteers; 12 county/district gazetteers	Beijing Yearbook, 1996-2008	Full text searchable; advanced search available
Fujian	福建省情库; 地方志之窗	http://www.fjsq.gov.cn/	Province gazetteer and dept gazetteers; city/county and town/township gazetteers	Province/city, dept yearbooks from 1985	"309 gazetteers of 355.109 million words" searchable; old local gazetteers included; registration required, restricted access to some gazetteers and most yearbooks
Guangdong	广东省情信息库	http://www.gd-info.gov.cn/	Province gazetteer and its 90 dept gazetteers; city/county gazetteers	NA	Search not working; bibliographic information for 广东旧志 (or 广东历代方志) available; 明·嘉靖十四年 广东通志初稿 full texts; including information of Hainan Island

² Double checked and verified in summer 2009. Further changes can be expected. Following the changes closely in a course of about three years, the author found that more websites with full texts of local gazetteers and yearbooks were created.

Guangxi	广西壮族自治区地方志, 地情信网	http://www.gxdqw.com/Item/3016.aspx	Province gazetteer and 38 dept gazetteers, 12 city/county gazetteers	Province yearbooks 2006-2008	Full-text searchable; bibliographic information 古籍旧志
Guizhou	贵州地方志	http://www.gz.gov.gov.cn/gov_dfz/default.asp	PDF files available for downloading	NA	贵州省地方志全文数据库 http://dfz.gznu.cn:81/tpi/sysasp/include/index.asp 包括68本省志和15本旧志的全文 and 146本志书的总目提要; full text searchable
Heilongjiang	中国龙志, 黑龙江省情信息网, 黑龙江省地方志办公室	http://www.zglz.gov.cn/	Province gazetteer and 14 dept gazetteers; city/county level gazetteers	Only some years at city and county levels available	Full text searchable, downloadable, many in .trs files; federation of full-text gazetteers, yearbooks of cities; help 要诀 available
Hebei	河北省地方志, 河北省情资料中心	http://www.hebdfz.com/	Only some links to a few city/county gazetteers available	NA	Database of gazetteer index does not work; Bibliographic information available
Henan	河南省情网, 河南省地方史志办公室	http://www.hnsqw.com.cn/	Province gazetteer and 30 dept gazetteers, 19 district gazetteers, full texts searchable, but hard to find access points	Henan Yearbook 2005 only	旧志在线 http://www.hnsqw.com.cn/zjyt/jzxx/ , no full texts
Hubei	湖北方志网	http://www.hbdfz.com.cn/	NA	Hubei Yearbook, 2001-2007	
Hunan	湖南地方志	http://www.library.hn.cn/difangwx/jiuzhi/zhuoye.htm	Province gazetteer and 29 dept gazetteers, 14 county/district gazetteers, partially full text	1994-2000	Dept gazetteers in abstract; county gazetteers in full text; searchable; Hunan Yearbook, 1985-1993 in abstract
Jiangsu	江苏省地方志	http://www.jsdfz.gov.cn/webpage/index.html	Province gazetteer and its 104 dept gazetteers; 13 county/district gazetteers	Jiangsu Almanac (Yearbook), 2001-2006	Dept gazetteers and Jiangsu Almanac full text searchable; county gazetteers in abstract
Jilin	吉林省情网	http://www.jlsg.gov.cn/default.asp (吉林省情网志鉴文库 http://www.jlsg.gov.cn/zjml.html)	Province gazetteer and 60 dept gazetteers, 40 county/district gazetteers, of which most full text available	Jilin Yearbook, 1987-2000, of which most are full texts; City/county/district yearbook, of which some are full texts	Gazetteers and yearbooks full text searchable; Jilin Yearbook 2001 listed but no text available, most yearbooks are of 1990s

Liaoning	辽宁地方志	http://www.ln.gov.cn/zjln/szfz/szjl/	辽宁省政府志 only	Lianoning Yearbok, 2004-2005	Full text searchable
Nei menggu	內蒙古區情網	http://www.nmqq.gov.cn/	NA	Nei Menggu Yearbook, 1998-2008	75 dept gazetteers in abstract; but Yearbook in full text
Shan dong	山东省情網	http://www.infobase.gov.cn/index.html	85 dept gazetteers; 31 county/district gazetteers	Shangdong Yearbook, 1987-2008	All in searchable full text; several 旧志 full-image available
Shang hai	上海通;上海市地方志辦公室	http://www.shotong.gov.cn/	106 dept gazetteers; 23 county/district gazetteers	Shanghai Yearbook1996-2008	Full text searchable; advanced search available
Shanxi	山西省史志研究院(山西省委党史研究室,当代山西研究所,山西省地方志办公室)	http://www.sx-gss.com/default.asp	NA	NA	Shanxi Yearbook 1985-1996 with introduction only; website changed to password protection
Shanxi	陕西省地情網 & 陕西省地情資料庫	http://www.sxsdq.cn/	Province gazetteers and its 11 dept gazetteers in 联库检索; 安塞县志 (1993)	Shanxi Yearbook 1999-2005, mostly full text; 安塞年鉴2006	An attempt to start federating local gazetteers and yearbooks
Tianjin	天津史志	http://www.tj.gov.cn/tblm/tj_sz/ (http://nj.tj.gov.cn/njhtm/index.htm)	City gazetteers and its 36 dept gazetteers	Tianjin Yearbook 2006 only	Website starts with 《天津通志·气象志》, other full texts available, but hard to search out
Xinjiang	新疆通覽	http://www.xjtonglan.com/index.asp	新疆通志机械电子工业志 only	NA	Largely only TOC & introduction
Yunnan	志云之南	http://www.yndfz.com/yndfz/index.asp	NA	NA	A rudimentary website in making
Zhejiang	浙江通志 (浙江地方志)	http://tz.zjol.com.cn/ (http://zjtz.zjol.com.cn/)	Only 绍兴县志	Only 绍兴县年鉴 2001	Including清雍正朝《浙江通志》标点本目录和索引, 浙江新编地方志目录, etc.

It was reported that a national database of new local gazetteer resources, called the National Database of New Local Gazetteer Resources, will be developed by the Academy of Social Sciences Library in cooperation with the Institute of Scientific and Technical information of China. The former holds a collection of about 21,000 titles, about 76% of China's new local gazetteers. The latter is known for its technological strengths in digitization, information retrieval and web-based distributed network management (Zeng & Zhao, 2007). It is hoped that the national database will be the most advanced comprehensive database for new local gazetteers. However, little progress to date has been reported on this intended large-scale collaborative project between the two independent administrative systems.

Conclusion

Traditionally, a local gazetteer was written and published, to make known the local place, glorify the emperor, and to express local pride. The compilation of local gazetteers was decreed by the central authorities and implemented by governmental officials of the localities. Generally, the local literati and official scholars who were most celebrated were responsible for the compiling and writing. The government was also supposed to be financially responsible for the whole process from collecting materials to printing books. More often than not, however, a number of important steps of the process such as carving book boards and printing were funded by the local gentry because government support was not forthcoming. Thus, by and large, in the last analysis local gazetteers were local initiatives. It was never an easy task to pull together historians and literary talents and the resources to work out a document of local history that few could find faults with and contemporaries and later generations would benefit from (Hymes, 1996).

Contemporary institutions responsible for the compilation of local gazetteers in China, however, try to guarantee the organizational, human and financial resources to be adequately available on a regular, continuous basis. This is one of the major reasons why recent years witnessed the rapid growth of local gazetteers and yearbook publications. It is to be hoped that Chinese economy continues to grow and the political and economic resources continue to be made available; then, the number of local gazetteer publications will continue to grow in both print and digital format. According to the officials of the Directorate, digitization projects, particularly website development and web-based database creation and integration, are on the Directorate's agenda, and they will be expanded in the near future.³ It is believed that digitization of local gazetteers and yearbooks will greatly improve and more e-content will be made available for public to use for free.

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³ The delegation of the Directorate met with the author on June 19, 2006 and communicated with the author by e-mail on March 2, 2007.

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