

## **Discovering Hidden Treasures: Old Chinese land deeds from Ming Dynasty to Republican China**

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The paper will present background of land deed systems used during Ming Dynasty, Qing Dynasty to Republican China in 1949 in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong by listing out current retrieval systems available for searching old Chinese land deeds.

Based on what the City University of Hong Kong Library recently received batches of old China land deeds, the paper will outline the importance of primary data – land deeds and how adding metadata and other features to the proposed current retrieval systems will assist in searching old Chinese land deeds.

Land deeds provide political, economic and sociological information. Such data may be related to changes in the government organizations responsible for issuing land deeds, costs of land price, demarcation of land, government and private seals, persons involved in the transaction, etc. The Library will propose a special metadata scheme for old Chinese land deeds based on Dublin Core. A searchable database will be based on the proposed metadata schema. In addition all contents in the land deeds will be transcribed for ease of retrieval. Since the geographical names change during the course of time, the database will provide conversion to modern place names, location of the place, etc. Furthermore, there will be a conversion system for land measurements which also change with time.

Some researchers have already been using some preliminary data of land deeds to conduct research such as to compare with the price of rice and living standards. The paper will compare what retrieval databases and research data on land deeds are available in Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, massive land deeds data in Mainland China are waiting to be made public. It is hope the hidden treasures of such important primary data can systematically organize to facilitate further studies and research.