The Origin of the Project: Robert Hartwell (1932-1996)

Professor Hartwell was an innovative scholar of Chinese “middle period” social history at the University of Pennsylvania.

Late in his distinguished career, in order to better examine long-term trends in the make-up of the Chinese bureaucratic elite, he designed a database to allow him to analyze information on Song dynasty officials. He taught himself the dBase programming language, created the database on his personal computer, and entered large amounts of information on officials and their kin.

When Professor Hartwell passed away, he left the database to the Harvard Yenching Institute. In 2004, the Harvard Yenching Institute requested that Michael Fuller update the database from its original MS-DOS format to a more usable Windows-based program. The goal of the project was to determine if the database is promising enough to serve as the basis for a much larger web-based version.

The China Historical Database

The database contains:

- 31,907 main biographical entries
- 67,406 entries on kinship relations
- 16,924 entries on non-kinship associations
- 4,542 entries on offices held
- 5,476 bibliographic entries

The types of information to be stored in the database:

- Name (Pinyin and Character) as well as 字, 號, 諡, etc.
- Date of birth, death, and active years
- Manner and year of entry into government service
- Offices held
- Kinship (agnatic and affinal)
- Non-kinship relationships (political, social, literary, scholarly, etc.)
- Texts written (both extant and not)
- Places associate with the person (from, moved to, buried at, etc.)
- References to documentation to support the above entries

If the design is appropriate, one possible goal is to add entries for the hundreds of thousands of people from about 400 B.C. through 1911 for whom biographical information survives in the vast corpus of Chinese historical materials.
The sources include:

• Dynastic Histories 正史
• Local histories 地方志
• Literary collections 文集
• Collections of inscriptions, temple records, etc.
• Encyclopedias and other textual compilations

What can one do with such a database? This is a relational database: it allows one to see connections between people based on the entries associated with them, and it can aggregate data drawn from many individuals. The database can:

- Quickly access biographical information on individuals
- Discover connections between individuals
- Examine correlations between place and patterns of association, between place and kinship, kinship and office, kinship and scholarly and literary activity, and so on.
- Look at long-term trends:
  - National or local kinship patterns: did people marry locally?
  - Geographic distribution and trends in mortality and migration
  - National or local patterns of office holding, as well as patterns of social mobility into and out of office

Some Snapshots: (1) the main window
(2) Georeferencing of Kinship

(3) Georeferencing of Associations:
Questions

1. What are the wider research questions within which you would wish to consult the China Biographical Database?
2. What are the key questions you would wish to examine through geo-referencing apart from kinship, non-kinship associations, and office holding?
3. What other (i.e. non-georeferenced) connections would you wish to investigate?
4. What specific fields would you expect to see in the web-based version of the database?
5. What period would you expect to be covered (Northern Song only, Song only, or Song-Yuan-Ming)?

Please give some thought to these issues, so that we can discuss them at the AAS meeting.