Mining and Mapping the *Yuewei*

Distant Reading of *Jottings from the Cottage of Subtle Perception* 閱微草堂筆記
(by Ji Yun 紀昀, 1724-1805), and approaches to Qing information networks
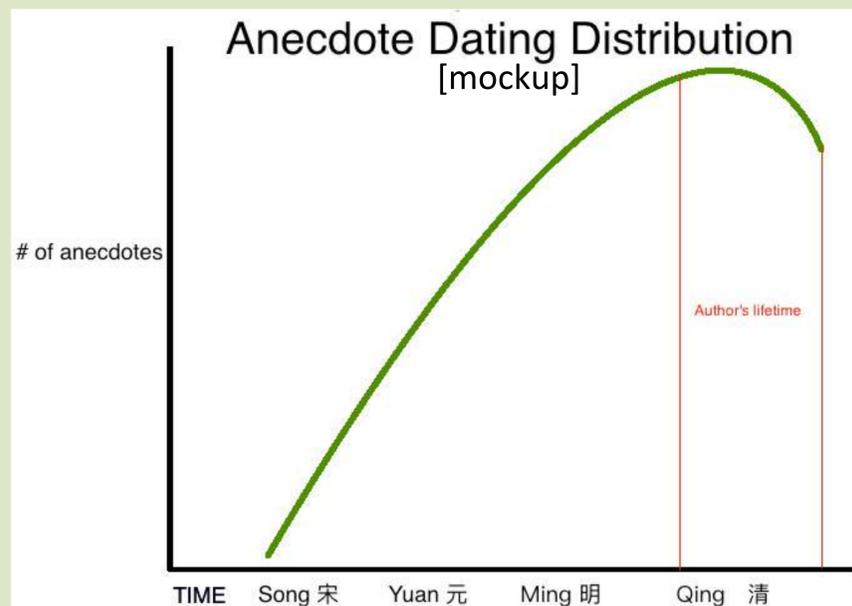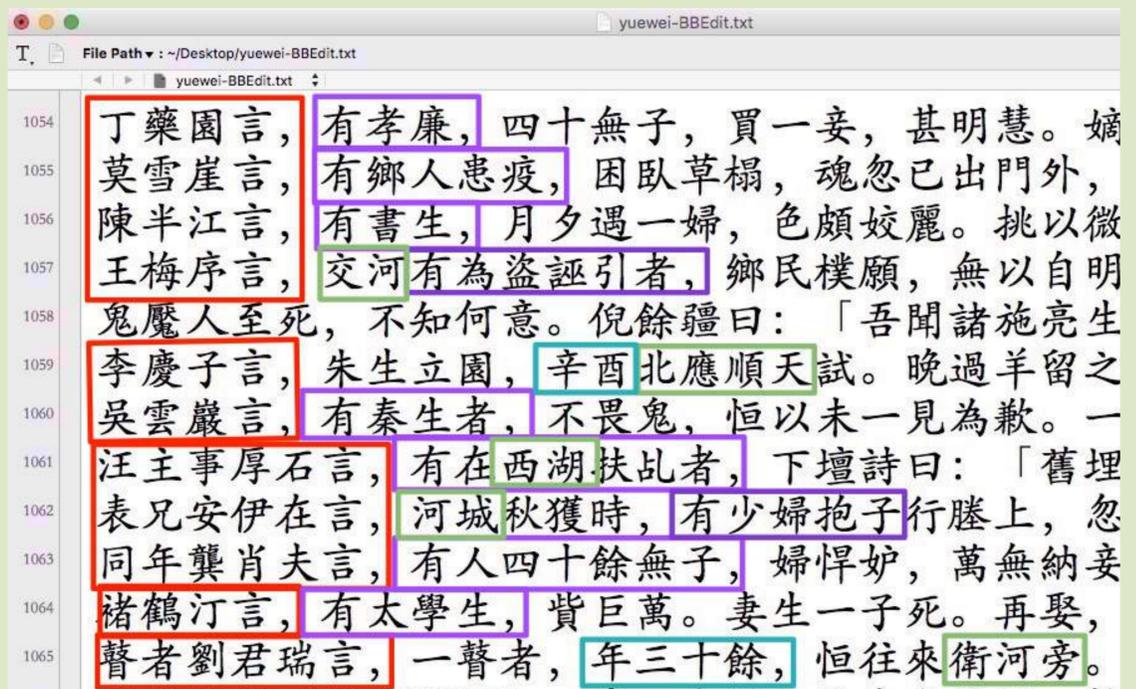
Abstract

Supported by a seed grant from Yale's digital humanities program, this project is in its conceptual stage. It will explore new mappings of Qing intellectual history, élite literary networks, and the spread of news and gossip through testing digital tools on the *Yuewei Caotang Biji*. The *Yuewei* is a canonical text of the 'jottings' (筆記／隨筆) genre, through which much Qing intellectual discourse was conducted. Methods refined on the *Yuewei* may then be used to undertake 'distant readings' of large quantities of Qing intellectual discourse in 'jottings' which cannot be subject to individual close readings.

This project is in its initial conceptual stages and welcomes advice from experienced digital humanists on tools and methodologies for its development. 請多指教

Why *Yuewei*?

- The *Yuewei* is a canonical text of approx. 1,200 anecdotes with a firmly established authorship, transmission lineage, and central status in Qing intellectual history.
- The career of its author (**Ji Yun** 紀昀, Hanlin academician and editor of the Siku Quanshu 四庫全書) and his intellectual milieu are well documented both in the *Yuewei* itself and in other existing sources, allowing information to be cross-referenced.
- The *Yuewei* is immediately available in punctuated plaintext.

Anecdote Dating Distribution [mockup]

Argument and Key Questions

My close reading of the *Yuewei* in its Qing intellectual context - rather than as a work of *xiaoshuo* 小說 - complicates the existing scholarly narrative of the book as one of supernatural anecdotes. Rather, I believe that the work is intended as one of polemic and history, carefully concerned with facts and sourcing.

This raises several questions:

- Is it possible to measure the 'factiness' of the text, or of particular anecdotes?
- Is it possible to measure the 'presentness' or 'currentness' of the work
- Is it possible to situate the Yuewei's constituent anecdotes in a visualized Qing social network?
- Is it worthwhile to geographically or temporally map the work's constituent anecdotes in visualizations using timelines or or maps of the Qing empire?

Potential Toolbox

- Authority database/ relational database
- Gephi network software
- Text tagging
- CartoDB map visualization
- Graphing through time