Ongoing Enhancement and Enrichment of the Chinese-English Dictionary of Ming Government Official Titles

The purpose of this application is to seek funding support to enhance the Chinese-English Dictionary of Ming Government Official Titles 明代職官中英辭典<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2bz3v185#main> in a short-run, by adding Chinese and English indexes, and to lay a foundation for ongoing enrichment of the dictionary as needed, by creating a long-term technical infrastructure. Specifically, the funding support will be used to (1) build an API connection between UC Irvine Libraries’ Crowd-Translation System for Ming Government Official Titles <https://mingofficialtitles.lib.uci.edu/#/> and Harvard’s China Biographical Database (CBDB) <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cbdb/home>, so that any future updates of Ming official titles in one system will be synchronized in the other; (2) update the current crowd-translation system in accordance with the published open-access dictionary, an essential step before the aforementioned API connection is put into use; and (3) enhance the usability of the dictionary by adding indexes of official titles in Chinese and English per feedback from scholars.

In January 2018, the primary applicant (Dr. Ying Zhang) was invited to give a presentation on the project of crowd-translating Ming government official titles, at the International Conference of Digital Humanities and East Asian Information Resource Sharing (Guangzhou, China). At the conference, she met Mr. Hongsu Wang, CBDB’s project manager. Mr. Wang commented the value of the crowd-translation system to CBDB and proposed to create an API link between the two systems. With the API connection, any future updates of Ming government official titles in one system will be automatically synchronized in the other. In late March 2018, right after her presentation on the crowd-translation project at the annual meeting of CEAL (Council on East Asian Libraries) in D.C., Ying was approached by Dr. Martin Heijdra, the director of James P. Geiss Foundation <https://geissfoundation.us>, and was encouraged to apply for a grant from the Foundation to continue working on the enhancement and enrichment of the dictionary, an essential reference tool for scholars who study China’s Ming dynasty (1368-1644).

The proposed project is a continued effort of the well-recognized CEAL-Mellon grant, through which two open-access resources, the bilingual dictionary and the expert-based crowd-translation system, have been made available to public through University of California’s e-Scholarlship program and at GitHub respectively. In the crowd-translation system, we have registered and approved 45 Ming/Chinese studies scholars. Among them, 17 has made at least one contributions each through the system. Meanwhile, since its official release on the eScholarship platform about seven six months ago, the dictionary has been viewed more than 5,500 times and has been downloaded nearly 1,500 times. Feedback from scholars are overwhelmingly positive – “very impressive”, “very, very helpful…cannot thank you enough”, “definitely in need of this dictionary”, and more.

Despite of the success, we have to acknowledge that with limited time and resources consulted under the CEAL-Mellon grant, the dictionary may not be inclusive and error free. Those 3,000+ official titles in the current dictionary are identified from a limited number of historical documents, either automatically by the CBDB team or manually by the crowd-translation project team. Whereas CBDB’s text-mining sources are primarily Academic Sinica’s databases of*明清檔案人名權威資料* and 明人傳記資料索引, the crowd-project team identified official titles main from *明史職官志* and *大明會典*. As the CBDB team proceeds with more text-mining of biographical data from other sources, such as *明史列傳*and *地方志*, there might be additional government official titles to be identified and need English translation. Meanwhile, the librarian team has made commitment to update the dictionary and the content in the crowd-translation system per feedback from scholars and new identifications from CBDB. We will continue to solicit English translations of the additional Ming government official titles through the system from registered Ming scholars. The development API connection between the two systems (i.e. CBDB and the crowd-translation) under this grant application will make all these future work more effective and efficient.

One programmer analyst (level 2) and one research coordinator (LA 4) will be hired under the grant to build the API application and update contents in both the crowd-translation system and the bilingual dictionary respectively.

The programmer will work closely, with the IT Department of UC Irvine Libraries, and Mr. Hongsu Wang, the manager of CBDB, to

* Build the API connection between the crowd-translation system <https://mingofficialtitles.lib.uci.edu/#/> and CBDB <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cbdb/home>
* Improve the crowd-translation system for a couple of features that did not get a chance to be realized under the CEAL-Mellon grant, such as a cleaner separation of archived official titles from those active ones

The anticipated core tasks for the research coordinator include:

* Perform content clean-up, specifically official titles, their translations and related notes in the crowd-translation system <https://mingofficialtitles.lib.uci.edu/#/>, and make sure they are consistent with the entries in the published dictionary at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2bz3v185>
* Prior to the completion of the API application, manually update official title related information in the crowd-translation system, while informing CBDB of the updates, if any
* Test the API application when it is implemented
* Add indexes of official titles (both Chinese and English) into the bilingual dictionary for an enhanced edition