Research Note, Skinner France Papers, Zach Smith

The G.W. Skinner Archive held at the University of Washington includes eight boxes of materials related to his work on France. This archive includes a large collection of raw data for the study of demographic change in 19th century France, several small collections of scholarship relevant to the interpretation of French demographic history, and correspondence with collaborators and colleagues.

The Intellectual Context of the Archive

G. William Skinner was an anthropologist whose scholarship was primarily concerned with the spatial and temporal structure of Chinese society, who made forays into the study of other regions in order to test the general applicability of his structural models. His work on France followed the same analytical framework that he applied elsewhere, and would interest scholars of France who wish to investigate how the social and material transformations associated with modernity, particularly regarding fertility and household formation, relate to a range of phenomena including commercial flows, differentials of prices and wages, ecological factors, and patterns of labor, consumption, and production. To interpret data on France Skinner used analytical approaches that appear in his wider work (primarily on China, but also including an important regional study of central Japan), investigating structures of core-periphery zones, urban-rural continuums, and urban hierarchy—the different dimensions that make up Skinner's conception of "hierarchical regional space." Given that Skinner articulated these conceptual tools at the same time he undertook his work on France, this archive will also be of interest to scholars who wish to examine Skinner's intellectual trajectory—how he developed a system of social, economic and spatial analysis to determine how variables accounting for a wide range of human activities related, in certain configurations, to unfolding forms of modernity. The material of the France archive amply demonstrates how he sought to account for similarities and differences in patterns of social and economic development by examining the spatial distribution of those patterns in tandem with measurable distributions of human economic activity.

The Contents of the Archive

The materials of the archive range from 1979 to 2002, and the majority relate to Skinner's efforts to tabulate and correlate data for all available variables, and to identify and manage his data sources. Here one finds a

plethora of tables and matrices dealing with demographic and economic variables at the level of arrondissement, canton, and 'central place' (and even at the level of the commune in the case of Lot-et-Garonne, in the region of Aquitaine). The data collected measure cultural and social phenomena (family type, family process [formation, dissolution/dipersal], fertility rates, marriage practices, and inheritance patterns) economic activity (wages and prices; services, professions and production), agricultural practice (landowning patterns, preponderance of sharecropping to lease-holding), and ecology (land cultivated for grain, for vines, or left as pasture). To make sense of his data, he employed the concepts of central place theory and hierarchical regional space, working from the idea that patterns of human behavior will be influenced spatially, according to the way human activity is dispersed in a given area. In this schema, central places are areas of denser economic, social, and cultural activity, which exist in a hierarchy of core-periphery zones, and on a gradient of urban to rural space.

Skinner's tabulations situate a wide range of variables in time and space—with differing levels of specificity according to available data—correlating within and between established meta-categories of ecology, economy, and family process to establish that certain behavioral trends emerge form nested configurations of these phenomena. A perusal of these tables demonstrates the different phases of Skinner's study of France, as his collaborators, his focus, and his available information changed. Throughout his project, however, Skinner consistently represented his data spatially in the scores of hand-colored choropleth maps that survive in the archive. These maps are in various states of development, from the roughly sketched out and narrowly focused to the fully realized, with multiple layers of information. They chart phenomena at both the regional and national levels. Additionally, a few collections of printed maps are also available, most notably a set of maps that assess central place values, at the canton level, for every *département* of France.

In addition to Skinner's analytical work, a substantial portion of the archive consists of raw data. This data is mostly photocopied from French archival sources, especially censuses and other statistical surveys (*Dénombrement de la population, Dictionnaire des postes: Division territoriale, Bulletin de lois*), and annotated by hand. Three reels of microfilm are also included.

Correspondence includes an exchange of letters with fellow scholars, such as Robert Schwartz, Professor of History at Mount Holyoke College. In this

exchange Skinner discusses his conception of the economic macro regions of France, and provides an interesting summary of how he conceptualized his France project from its onset through the 1990s. Also in the archive are several exchanges with collaborators, the most extensive being Skinner's correspondence with Ted W. Margadant, Professor of History at UC Davis, regarding the use of arrondissements and cantons as units of historical spatial analysis, and how to track and encode changes in political boundaries over time.

Unpublished work in the collection includes several incarnations of a conference paper, worked up in the 1980s, which attempted to explain spatial variations in France's brief demographic "bump" in the 1870s (a short period of rising fertility), by establishing how birth rates in specific locations corresponded to their relative positions in the rural/urban continuum, and core/periphery structure (representatives of the core demonstrated the least divergence from the general downward trends in fertility throughout the 19th century).

Rounding out the collection are four small groupings of published articles, gathered by Skinner, which relate in different ways to his work on France (demographic history, nineteenth century migration, nineteenth century social history), as well as a number of bibliographies of relevant fields.

While he was in the process of undertaking his work on France in the 1980s and early 1990s, Skinner remained intent upon comparing his findings on France with his findings on China and Japan. He assumed all three places underwent developmental (modernizing) processes that were sufficiently similar for such comparative work to be possible, and perhaps he intended ultimately to uncover a set of universal principles of rural/social transformation. One can gather from the archive that his thinking changed, however, regarding the feasibility of such a comparative project, by the latter half of the 90s, according to correspondence in 2002.

The Skinner France archive, along with his other scholarly archives, are housed at the University of Washington. Scholars interested in using the Skinner materials should contact Professor Stevan Harrell stevehar@uw.edu, or Professor William Lavely lavely@uw.edu.