

## **Conservator Kristin A. Phelps on the Nature of the Xia Nai Index**

Notes on research are often written in short hand on scraps of paper, or collected as images that may mean something to the writer, but have no notes to explain content or context to others. In other words, they are meant solely for the understanding of the scholar him- or herself, rather than for the consumption of any other researcher. With the Xia Nai bead index, it seems clear from the meticulous contents that this was something that Xia Nai was putting together for productive use in the future by others. He makes sure that his notes are clear and easy to follow, and he includes both an index and a bibliography to help the modern scholar understand exactly what he was observing and recording with each card. In addition, he has used a consistent, standard size medium for his index, which has lent itself to being handled and used easily for research. In sum, this is a modern index and, had it been available in the 1940's, we would probably already have long enjoyed a 'live' version online. Unfortunately, over the years, the material and the handling of the index have taken their toll. Due to the index media of ink, graphite and coloured pencil on non-archival quality stock, many of the cards now look yellowed, faded or the graphite is smudged to almost the point of illegibility. With the digitised index, scholars may not only enjoy being able to view and use these cards anywhere, but also have the ability to enlarge or manipulate the images for clearer study.