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Wong, Rebekah Shun Han; Li, Haipeng

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An Assessment of Readiness for Supporting Digital Humanities in Hong Kong Academic Libraries: Evaluating the Potential for Program Development and International Collaboration

Rebekah S. H. WONG

Digital and Multimedia Services Librarian, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

Haipeng LI

University Librarian, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This book chapter will assess the state of digital humanities across Hong Kong academic libraries and evaluate the potential for international collaborations. A survey was administered to the eight member institutions of the University Grants Committee in Hong Kong to examine the level of engagement in digital humanities, support structure at their institutions, and partnership opportunities. Survey respondents indicated the importance of supporting digital humanities, but this importance has not been fully reflected on the institutional level. Hong Kong libraries have undertaken a range of activities to support digital humanities, while embracing intra-institutional partnerships. Surveyed institutions also indicated that the potential for international collaborations, in particular, exists and is worth the efforts of further exploration. Their major challenges are building a strong faculty-librarian partnership, getting adequate financial and personnel resources, and enhancing staff experience and skills in this area.

Keywords: Digital Humanities, Hong Kong, International Collaboration

INTRODUCTION

As humanities scholars are paying more and more attention to the utilization of technologies in their research, the field of digital humanities has started to build up momentum as an emerging area of research. As a result, librarians have also been discussing the role of academic libraries in supporting digital humanities, addressing questions such as what approaches to take and how to provide the support. Recent surveys conducted by various organizations in the United States indicate growing activity in the digital humanities across small colleges and large universities, with increasing collaboration between scholars and libraries. Such collaboration may also involve international partnerships, particularly in Europe and East Asia. These trends provide a timely opportunity for academic libraries across all continents to assess their potential for developing further collaboration.

This chapter will examine past and current digital humanities efforts led by academic libraries in Hong Kong to assess the state of digital humanities across Hong Kong universities. A survey was administered specifically to member institutions of the University Grants Committee (UGC) in Hong Kong in order to examine the level of engagement in digital humanities, support structure at their institutions, and partnership opportunities between libraries and scholars. The findings of this environmental scan will be used to evaluate the potential for a digital humanities collaboration program model for Hong Kong and, by extension, Chinese and Taiwanese universities, identifying cultural implications and the impact on digital humanities in the region.

BACKGROUND

Digital Humanities in U.S. Academic Institutions

In the past decade, there have been several environmental scans and studies of digital humanities programs across academic and non-academic institutions. Three significant reports have been compiled by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), and OCLC Research. Although the studies were conducted within several years of each other, the goals and subsequent survey results were not identical. These reports also reflect the constantly evolving nature of digital humanities.

In preparation for the 2008 Scholarly Communications Institute, CLIR commissioned a survey of institutions in the United States regarding their digital humanities centers and programs. Zorich (2008) reported that thirty two organizations took part in the survey, which categorized programs as either center-focused or resource-focused (pp. 6, 40). The word “center” was used to denote a physical and/or virtual space dedicated to the carrying out of activities pertinent to a central purpose (Zorich, 2008, p. 4). The study defined “digital humanities” as “humanities-based research, teaching, and intellectual engagement conducted with digital technologies and resources” with a distinction between using technology to aid in research and teaching or the development of entirely new products and processes for the transformation of scholarship (Zorich, 2008, p. 4). Some key issues addressed were that the siloing, or organizational restrictions, of centers and the inability to make effective use of resources across the community were impeding developments in digital humanities. This was particularly problematic for the building of a digital humanities cyberinfrastructure with a lack of coordinated initiatives (Zorich, 2008, pp. 42-44).

In 2011, Bryson, Posner, Pierre, and Varner published an ARL SPEC Kit 326, providing an overview of research library experiences with digital humanities services and the corresponding benefits and challenges. The survey was sent to the 126 member institutions of ARL, with a response rate of 51%. The survey sections included the following areas of focus: Background, Project Staffing, Services and Support, Hardware and Software, Service Users, Project Workspace, Funding Sources, Policies and Procedures, Sustainability, Partnerships, Assessment, Institution Provides Digital Scholarship Services,

and Additional Comments. Bryson et al. (2011) reported that 5% of respondents had a library that hosted a digital humanities center (p. 16), 52% of respondents had dedicated space for their digital humanities activities (p. 41), and 35% of respondents had dedicated staff but generally fewer than five individuals (pp. 18-19).

The institutions with dedicated staff noted that they generally consisted of digital scholarship/humanities librarians, technologists, and then subject librarians. Traditional metadata and librarianship skills were also identified as useful and relevant to their initiatives (Bryson et al., 2011, pp. 12, 18). Most surveyed libraries indicated that sustainability of digital humanities centers and programs was considered, but a successful strategy for doing so had yet to be identified (Bryson et al., 2011, pp. 13, 48-49).

In 2014, Schaffner and Erway addressed the current state of involvement of libraries in the digital humanities in an OCLC publication. Schaffner and Erway (2014) collected data through two informal focus groups with digital humanists as well as attendance at major digital humanities events such as Digital Humanities 2013 (p. 7). Although the report did not break down findings into statistical data, it offered insights into the needs of faculty with strategies on developing staff and creating services.

More recently, Maron and Pickle (2014) explored the various models that academic institutions have established in support of digital humanities research on their campuses, through interviews with over 125 digital humanities project leaders across the United States (p. 4). In particular, a “deep-dive” interview process that included four universities—Columbia University, Brown University, Indiana University Bloomington, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison—was conducted to better understand how these universities attempt to sustain efforts in support of digital humanities and what best practices are there or emerging (Maron and Pickle, 2014, p. 4). This study was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in the U.S., and the result was published by ITHAKA. Maron and Pickle (2014) noted that the successful strategies for sustaining digital humanities efforts included establishing deep partnerships among different units on campus, managing faculty expectations at the early stages, and developing scalable solutions (pp. 50-52).

While digital humanities programs are often associated with large institutions with an array of available resources, there is increasing activity within smaller liberal arts and even community colleges. A few examples of these programs include Hamilton College’s “Digital Humanities Initiative” (<http://www.dhinitiative.org/about/mission>), Richard Stockton College’s “Center for the Digital Humanities” (<https://dh.stockton.edu/>), and the Five College Consortium’s “Five College Digital Humanities” (<http://5colldh.org/>). Their operational models are also informative to the greater community such as schools like the University of San Francisco, openly stating that “the efforts underway at smaller liberal arts colleges appears to be a better model for shaping the discussion at USF” (Rozendal and Calhoun, 2014, para. 1). This process seems logical in cases where institutional support may not be available.

International Initiatives

Support for and innovation within the digital humanities also occurs outside the United States. Two notable resources available to the international digital humanities community are the Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) and centerNet. GO::DH, affiliated with the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, provides a base network upon which to establish new connections, with a specific dedication to facilitating connections between digital humanists in different countries (Global Outlook::Digital Humanities, 2014, para. 1-2). centerNet evolved from a 2007 event hosted by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the University of Maryland, College Park; it has gone on to affiliate itself with the Coalition of Humanities and Arts Infrastructures and Networks (CHAIN) and the Consortium of Humanities Centers Institutions (CHCI) (centerNet, 2014, About section, para. 2-3).

centerNet currently has 19 centers in the Asia Pacific Region alone, including the Library and Information Center at the Dharma Drum Buddhist Center and the Research Center for Digital Humanities at National Taiwan University (centerNet, 2014, The International Directory of Digital Humanities Centers section). Other international collaboration efforts in place include the Praxis Network at the University of Virginia, which is comprised of 8 member institutions from Canada, United Kingdom, and the United States (The Praxis Network, 2014), and the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (<http://adho.org/>).

Over the past few years, the Asia Pacific region has started to engage in the digital humanities community, with a number of conferences of various sizes organized within the region. Since 2009, the International Conference of Digital Archives and Digital Humanities has taken place in Taiwan on a near-annual basis (National Taiwan University, 2014, Past Conferences section). Participants are encouraged to engage in cross-disciplinary discussions with the intent of developing new research ideas and increasing contributions to the digital humanities community at large. The Second Asia-Pacific DH centerNet Meeting in Japan provided a status update on the digital humanities research and network at the country, region, center, and institutional level as well as promote collaboration between Asia-Pacific centers/institutions (Asia-Pacific Digital Humanities Centernet, 2010, para. 1). More recently, the Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) hosted two conferences on digital humanities. Both events featured speakers including scholars and librarians from both the United States and Hong Kong (Hong Kong Baptist University, 2013, Program section; Hong Kong Baptist University, 2014, Program section).

A major example of an Asia-based large scale collaboration is the International Dunhuang Project (IDP). The IDP was created for this conservation, cataloguing, and digitizing of manuscripts, woodblock prints, paintings, photographs, and other artifacts that were created thousands of years ago in ancient China. The project is described as “a ground breaking international collaboration to make information and images of all manuscripts, paintings, textiles and artifacts from Dunhuang and archaeological sites of the Eastern Silk Road freely available on the Internet and to encourage their use through educational and research programmes” (International Dunhuang Project, 2014, The International Dunhuang Project section, para. 1). The project was started by the British Library in 1994 involving librarians and researchers as partners from Great Britain, China, Russia, Japan, Germany, France, and Korea, among others. It now has seven centers located worldwide with two in China: Beijing and Dunhuang (International Dunhuang Project, 2014, About IDP section, para. 7).

Why Study Hong Kong Academic Libraries?

Although the concept of digital humanities as a scholarly field has been introduced to the Hong Kong environment very recently, a certain level of digital humanities activities have taken place in Hong Kong academic libraries. As an area with a very strong international presence, Hong Kong has the ability to collaborate with other countries in the digital humanities and hopefully influence their Asian peers in terms of innovative ideas at the same time.

Higher education in Hong Kong is closely modelled on the British system. Although changes have occurred in the system since the handover to China in 1997, the educational model is still heavily in line with Western practice. Academic libraries in Hong Kong are also deeply influenced by their Western counterparts, where most librarians in Hong Kong received their library education in the United States, United Kingdom, or Australia. Hong Kong has also attracted quite a number of librarians from Western countries due to similarity of the education systems. Hong Kong academic libraries are well positioned to make a certain impact on academic libraries in the greater China region due to commonalities in language and culture. This mix of educational and cultural backgrounds places Hong Kong’s academic librarians in a good position to act as liaisons between Western and Chinese library practices.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

To provide a snapshot of Hong Kong library experiences with digital humanities support and its future direction, a survey was administered to the libraries of the eight higher education institutions funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) of the Hong Kong SAR Government. These libraries are also known as the Joint University Librarians Advisory Committee (JULAC) libraries, a consortium that was established in 1967. It serves as a forum to discuss, coordinate, and collaborate on library information resources and services among these eight member libraries. The survey focused on this consortium as this is where discussions and efforts surrounding support for digital humanities have taken place in Hong Kong.

The size and focus of these eight institutions are varied, ranging from a large research university with close to 29,000 students to a small liberal arts college with just over 2,500 students. Table 1 provides a brief overview of the eight universities with their student enrolment figures, which are listed in alphabetical order.

Table 1. An Overview of the Eight UGC Institutions

	STUDENT ENROLMENT (Headcounts)			TOTAL
	Undergraduate Students	Graduate Students Studying Taught Master's	Graduate Students Studying Research Programs	
Chinese University of Hong Kong	15314	1215	2169	18698
City University of Hong Kong	12401	2529	958	15888
Hong Kong Baptist University	6420	3476	395	10291
Hong Kong Institute of Education	5172	862	44	6078
Hong Kong University of Science & Technology	8640	2719	1225	12584
Lingnan University	2586	0	73	2659
Polytechnic University of Hong Kong	18571	8898	1447	28916
The University of Hong Kong	15227	9624	2154	27005

Information of student enrolment was retrieved from the websites of these universities.

The authors referenced the ARL survey (Bryson et al., 2011, pp. 16-61) while preparing for this survey, so that an appropriate level of comparison between academic libraries in Hong Kong and those in the United States could be made. Nevertheless, most questions were tailored to the specific needs of the Hong Kong environment. The survey was designed to focus on library-led digital humanities programs and explore the following five major aspects, among other questions:

- Measurement of Importance of Digital Humanities – Respondents are first asked to provide a subjective ranking. Then, they need to give actual information linking to their mission statements, organizational structures, operating budgets, etc.
- Implementation – This segment walks through some of the implementation details, such as digital humanities activities that they have held, internal and external partnership, funding sources, and space and facilities dedicated to this program.
- Assessment – Information about their assessment guidelines is collected.
- Challenges – Respondents are invited to share the challenges that they have encountered and

- their foreseeable concerns.
- Forward-Looking Questions – The last segment is tailored to address future plans, visionary thoughts, and perspectives on potential international collaborations.

The survey consisted of 20 questions presented on a Likert type scale. There was a mix of the type of questions asked– multiple choice questions, yes/no questions, as well as open-ended questions to allow more elaborative written responses. The full version of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

The survey was conducted between March 14 and April 3, 2014. Given the small number of surveyed libraries, it was decided that an online survey format was not cost-effective in this circumstance. Instead, a Word document containing the survey was emailed to all JULAC library directors. All eight libraries completed this survey for a response rate of 100%. While some surveys were completed by the library directors, others were completed by designated library staff. Several follow-up phone calls were made to one responding library because it had not developed an awareness of the trend of digital humanities and confused it with digital information literacy projects. The authors also studied the public websites of these libraries to get a better understanding of their digital humanities activities.

SURVEY FINDINGS

To provide a clear picture of where Hong Kong libraries currently stand in the global movement of digital humanities, the following sections will not only present major survey findings, but also attempt to draw comparisons between Hong Kong libraries and American libraries, if such data exists. The authors chose to examine the United States model as a benchmark standard, if there is one, due to the rapid development of the United States academic libraries' involvement in support of digital humanities. Based on the scale, significance, and recognition of the ARL's *SPEC Kit 326* report (Bryson et al., 2011, pp. 16-61), its findings will be used as a reference in the discussions of the Hong Kong environment. The authors acknowledge the fact that changes may have happened in the United States since the 2011 survey, but this survey is still the most recent one in this area.

Institutional Support for Digital Humanities Varies in Hong Kong

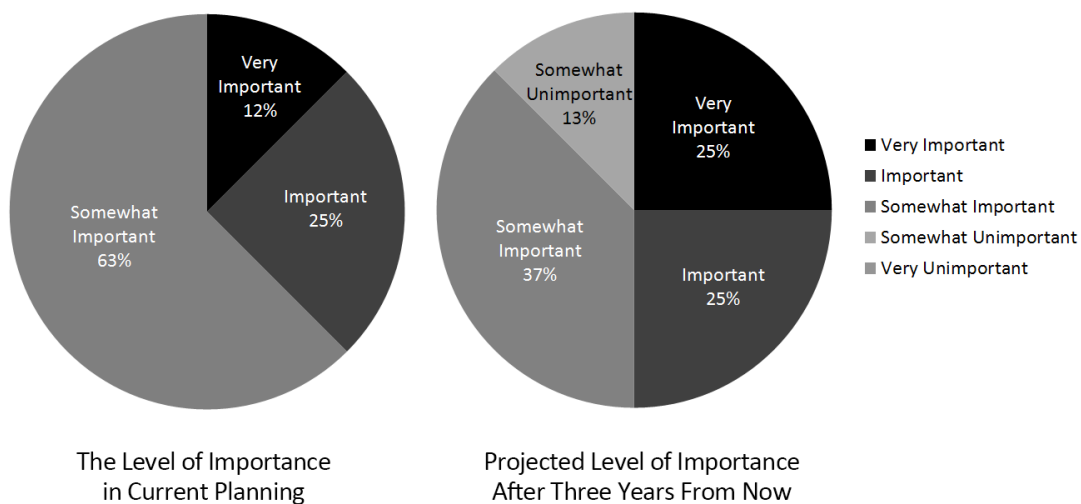
Although none of the eight UGC institutions currently hosts a center dedicated to supporting digital humanities or digital scholarship, one institution recently launched a Data Science Initiative Taskforce, which is multidisciplinary and comprised of faculty members from the Schools of Humanities and Social Sciences, Engineering, and Science. Another institution offers central funding to support digital humanities services. One digitization project led by the Department of Social Sciences at this institution was supported by this central funding.

One library indicated that individual academic departments of its institution have developed centers to support digital humanities. Departmental initiatives of other institutions are more on an ad hoc basis. For example, a number of humanities or social sciences related research centers at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology have created various databases and shared survey data online. The School of Creative Media and the Department of English at the City University of Hong Kong also organized a three-day event named "Roundtable on New Technologies and the Future of the Humanities" in May 2014. This roundtable is expected to "bring together literary theorists, writers, computer programmers, and artists to investigate the impact of new technologies on the humanities" (City University of Hong Kong, 2014, para. 1). In general, most Hong Kong higher institutions provide some level of institutional support for digital humanities, but this effort is often done only if the need arises.

Hong Kong Libraries Indicate the Importance of Supporting Digital Humanities

Despite the limitations of institution-wide initiatives, all eight libraries (100%) indicated that supporting digital humanities is important in their current planning, ranging from “Very Important” to “Somewhat Important”. Seven libraries anticipated that digital humanities will remain important in three years. Of these seven libraries, two expected an increase in importance, whereas five anticipated it remaining more or less the same. The perceived lack of change may have two reasons. First, some libraries gave a relatively high importance rating in regard to their current planning, so it is natural that the projected rating will not go up. The second reason is related to the direction and culture of the institution: One library’s response was that “doing and supporting digital humanities has been part of [our] library’s regular work for decades. It will take more of a mandate from the university, or revealed demand from faculty or students to raise it to a higher level of urgency.” Please refer to Chart 2 for the distribution of libraries’ answers regarding their current planning and projections.

**Chart 2. The Importance of Supporting Digital Humanities
(Subjective Rating, N=8)**



Diverging from these views, one library anticipated a decrease of future digital humanities support by selecting “Somewhat Unimportant”. This library explained that its priority will “largely” depend on the strategic direction of the university, which was projected to pay less attention to digital humanities, but offered no further elaboration.

The Importance of Digital Humanities Has Not Been Fully Reflected on the Administration Level

Subjective statements and objective phenomena linked to mission statements, organizational structures, and operating budgets are equally important in reflecting a library’s perspective on its role in digital humanities support. Only one library mentioned its support for digital humanities or digital scholarship in its mission statement, and its explicit and direct wording is encouraging. According to the response of this library, one of its six strategic directions states:

Play an essential role in scholarly communication via advocacy, education, and the digital curation of unique content. We will lead the HKBU community in understanding and proactively adopting new

models of scholarly communication and output in order to benefit the University and the wider global community. (Hong Kong Baptist University Library, 2013, p. 2)

This same library is the only library to have a policy or written statement describing the ways in which it supports digital humanities. It has a webpage entitled “Digital Services” that is immediately accessible from the homepage of its public website. The *SPEC Kit 326* report showed 12% for a similar question, demonstrating both regions share a similar figure in this area (Bryson et al., 2011, p. 44).

One library (14%) designated a specific unit to support digital humanities service. Through its recent reconfiguration of an existing audio-visual department to a “Digital and Multimedia Services Section,” as the name implies, this unit is now dedicated to both digital humanities and multimedia services. This unit has one professional librarian at the rank of senior assistant librarian, four para-professional staff, and a number of part-time assistants. Six libraries call on staff from different units as needs arise, such as a Technology Support team, Special Collections, University Archives, Technical Services, Reference, and branch libraries. It is worth noting that one of these six libraries has recently created a new digital humanities librarian position, and recruitment is in process. One library does not currently support digital humanities. In Hong Kong, a library’s organizational structure or staffing levels developed to support digital humanities may not necessarily correspond to its size. Larger libraries with over 200 staff and smaller libraries with less than 40 staff assign staff only if the need arises. We believe a library’s staffing model in supporting digital humanities is more related to its prioritization of service and its strategic directions.¹

The fact that all seven libraries that are providing digital humanities support use their operating budget to fund all or part of these projects is a good sign. This arrangement can ensure a certain level of stability and flexibility of financial support. However, only one library (14%) receives monetary support from the university’s operating budget. Other sources of funding are ad hoc and temporary, including academic departments (43%), special one-time funds (29%), and grants (29%).

Range of Activities Undertaken in Hong Kong

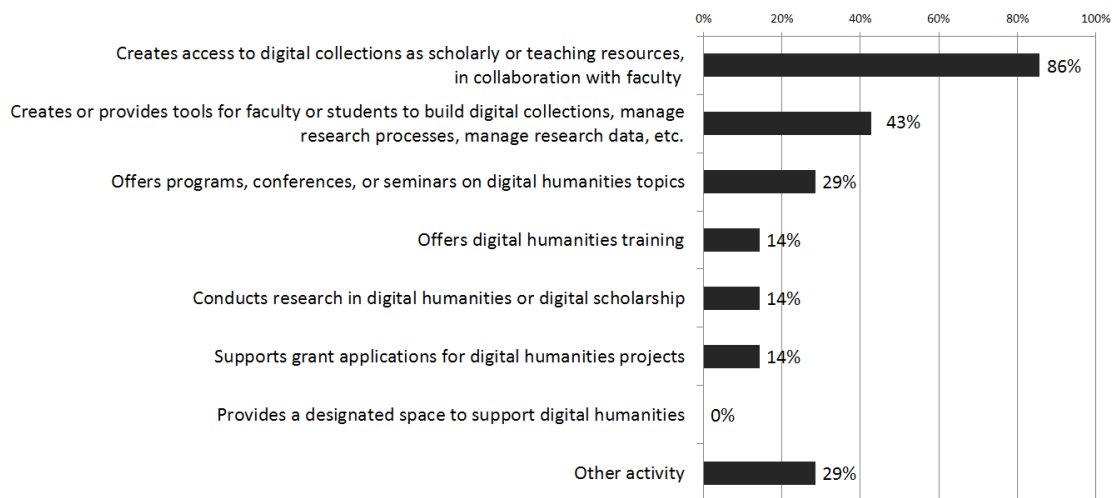
JULAC libraries undertake a range of services and activities to support digital humanities. Among the seven libraries that are supporting digital humanities, six of them create access to digital collections as scholarly or teaching resources. These digital collections are usually developed in collaboration with faculty. They cover different topics and materials, including Korean classics, Chinese history data, Chinese medicine information, law materials, government publications, bamboo manuscripts, historical maps, and Christianity records to name but a few. Text, pictures, videos, interactive images, sound recordings, etc. are presented on these online resources. Some of the more popular or larger digital collections include the following:

- Hong Kong Memory (<https://www.hkmemory.hk/>), developed by the University of Hong Kong Libraries (2012). It is a multimedia website that gives the general public access to digitized materials on Hong Kong’s history, culture, and heritage.
- Tribute Data Curation (<http://digital.lib.hkbu.edu.hk/history/tribute.php>), developed by Hong Kong Baptist University Library (2014). It is a dataset that consists of evidence from records of tribute collected in Heilongjiang, China during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).
- Discovering East Asian Culture by Indexing Korean Classics (http://www.cityu.edu.hk/lib/about/event/ce_kr_classics/index.htm), developed by the Run Run Shaw Library of the City University of Hong Kong (2012). It is an online collection of more than 3,000 classic anthologies written by Korean writers in the Chinese language. Members of this institution can access the full text.

Three libraries create or provide tools for faculty or students to build digital collections, as well as manage research processes and data. The authors found that Omeka is a common tool in these three libraries, but its use is for different purposes with various degrees of additional functionality. For example, one library recently set up Omeka to be used in a history course with 72 students. These students were asked to collaborate in groups to create original history datasets about gender issues and publish their data on Omeka. Plugins related to collection hierarchy, item formats, user profiles, and interface design were used. Other activities include offering programs, conferences, or seminars (29%), offering training (14%), conducting research (14%), and supporting grant applications (14%). One library also indicated that it recently participated in a new university-wide Data Science Initiative Taskforce, which may engage that library more in digital humanities or data curation.

It is interesting to note that none of the Hong Kong libraries provide a designated space to support digital humanities. This fact is hardly surprising since a lack of space is the core common problem for all Hong Kong entities. With a land mass of 1,104 km² and a population of more than seven million people, Hong Kong is one of the most densely populated cities in the world. This data also explains why local academic libraries have engaged in a never-ending struggle for space, and cannot provide any physical space specifically for digital humanities activities. In contrast, 52% of responding ARL libraries provide dedicated library space for using hardware and software that are available to support digital humanities projects (Bryson et al., 2011, p. 41). Please refer to Chart 3 for all activities undertaken to support digital humanities.

Chart 3. Digital Humanities Activities being Held (N=7)



Hong Kong Libraries Embrace Intra-Institutional and International Collaborations

Of those Hong Kong libraries that support digital humanities, intra-institutional collaboration is quite common (86%). These libraries demonstrate a level of diversity within these partnerships, particularly with academic departments. Academic departments have much to gain from partnerships with university libraries on digital humanities, and vice versa: Faculty or researchers provide content, subject knowledge, and a network of scholars. Librarians offer expertise in information management, deal with technology,

and provide training. 71% of the surveyed libraries partner with teaching or research units in their institutions. Examples include the following:

- Architecture
- Chinese Language and Literature
- Chinese Medicine
- Communication Studies
- Dentistry
- Film
- History
- Humanities
- Journalism
- Law
- Music
- Religious Studies
- Social Sciences
- Translation
- Visual Arts

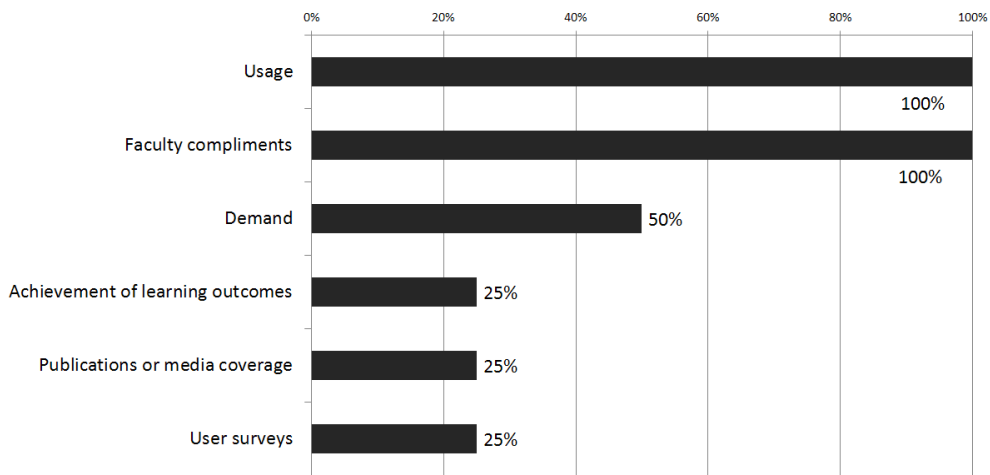
This figure is quite close to the data of the ARL survey showing that 75% of responding libraries have intra-institutional partnerships (Bryson et al., 2011, p. 50). Some libraries, in the Hong Kong survey, also partner with administrative units to provide digital humanities support, most frequently with the university press and technology center.

Hong Kong libraries are no strangers to international collaboration: The international work environment and historical background of Hong Kong mentioned earlier, is the determining factor. During the last ten years, JULAC libraries have collaborated with a number of overseas libraries on digital humanities projects, including Yale University and the University of California in Berkeley from the United States, Jeju National University from Korea, and Peking University, Nanjing University and Jinan University from Mainland China. Nevertheless, it seems that all previous and current international collaboration in Hong Kong were set up to develop digital collections. There is no sign of collaboration in other types of digital humanities activities. Looking forward, seven out of eight JULAC libraries (88%) welcome and encourage international collaborations on digital humanities projects.

Usage and Faculty Compliments are the Two Main Measures of Success

Of the seven libraries that are supporting digital humanities, one library has guidelines or rubrics in place to assess the success or effectiveness of its digital humanities programs. Three libraries are planning for their assessment strategies, and another three libraries indicated that such guidelines are neither in place nor under planning. Among the responding libraries that either have guidelines or are going to have guidelines, usage and faculty compliments are the two most important indicators for them to evaluate their digital humanities services. Other assessment measures of success include an increase in demand, achievement of learning outcomes, research publications or media coverage on the projects, and results of user surveys. Please refer to Chart 4.

**Chart 4. Current and Planning Assessment Measures
(N=4)**



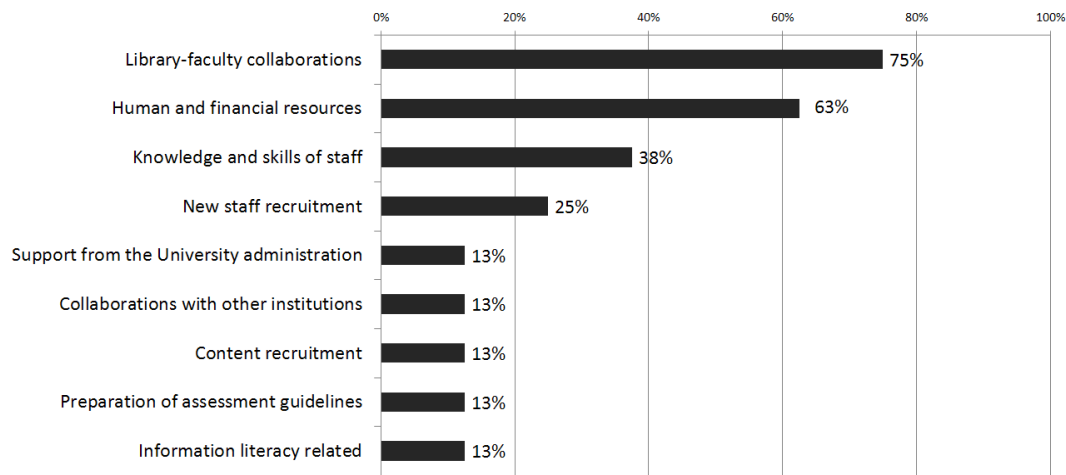
Major Challenges Relate to Faculty Partnerships, Resources, and Staff Capabilities

In their own words, all responding libraries were asked to identify the top three challenges that they had encountered or foresaw encountering in supporting digital humanities. Although 71% of the responding libraries that support digital humanities partner with academic departments in their institutions, building up these partnerships is still their biggest challenge (75%). Apparently these libraries are not satisfied with the status quo. They are also fully aware of their advocacy role in moving these partnerships ahead, as the use of proactive terms in regards to faculty-library partnerships, such as “creating,” “outreach[ing],” “build[ing] up,” and “identifying” was high. The second major challenge lies in the inadequacy of human and financial resources (63%). The authors believe this is a universal challenge across all continents.

Additional challenges exist in staff capabilities. Three libraries (38%) mentioned a lack of skills and expertise of current staff as a problem. Some of these libraries emphasize the technical know-how, while others mention staff experience. Two other libraries (25%) take a different approach and attempted or plan to recruit staff with the necessary skills and experience. They think that recruiting suitable candidates is challenging.

Other challenges mentioned include getting support from the university’s administration (13%), building collaboration with other institutions (13%), identifying suitable content for digitization (13%), preparing assessment guidelines (13%), and helping students learn to make use of good resources (13%). Please refer to Chart 5 for the details.

**Chart 5. Top Challenges Identified
(N=8)**



DISCUSSIONS

As mentioned earlier, the concept of “digital humanities,” as a scholarly field, has only very recently been introduced to Hong Kong. The notion of establishing partnerships between libraries and academics is even newer. However, as this survey indicates, Hong Kong academic libraries are interested in their role in supporting digital humanities development at their respective institutions. Even though the range of activities and level of engagement vary, it seems that these institutions have all taken on some level of activity in supporting digital humanities, ranging from digitizing and preserving their previously owned collections to collaborating with individual researchers or departments. This phenomenon indicates that there is no single answer to the question of how best to approach supporting digital humanities from the perspective of academic libraries. Sula (2013) also pointed out that “the points of connection between libraries and DH were varied and often dependent on the needs of particular faculty members (i.e., users) within an institution” (pp. 23-24).

Digital Humanities Support Strategies

In an attempt to institutionalize efforts for digital humanities, some academic libraries in the United States have incorporated digital humanities support in their mission statements or strategic planning process. For example, the Digital Humanities Center at Columbia University Libraries is described as “one of three divisional or subject-oriented digital centers at Columbia Libraries” that lends various kinds of support for digital humanities (Columbia University Libraries, 2014, para. 1). The Alabama Digital Humanities Center of the University of Alabama has offered “faculty, staff, and advanced students resources to explore digital humanities” and strives to “encourage and engage faculty and graduate students in art, humanities, and performing arts digital research” (University of Alabama, 2014, para. 1). The Center for Digital Research in the Humanities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has promoted the advancement of “interdisciplinary, collaborative research, and offers forums, workshops and research fellowships for faculty and students in the area of digital scholarship...[providing] a life-changing experience for students and faculty alike...[and] leading to new ways of thinking about the humanities” (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2014, para. 1). Several librarians of Hamilton College are team members of the college-wide Digital Humanities Initiative, which is “a collaboratory–digital parlance for

a research and teaching collaboration—where new media and computing technologies are used to promote humanities-based teaching, research, and scholarship across the liberal arts” (Hamilton College, 2014, para. 1).

In these instances, librarians have identified areas where they can play an important role in supporting the work of scholars in digital humanities by engaging in activities such as managing data, “embedded” librarianship, digitization and curation, digital preservation, and discovery and dissemination (Showers, 2012, para. 5-9).

Institutional scale planning to support research in digital humanities, similar to these examples, requires an established infrastructure. However, this is lacking in most of Hong Kong academic libraries. As the report indicates, only one library out of the eight institutions has made it clear in its strategic direction that would lend the needed, as well as sustained ongoing, support in this area. Without identifying such support within its strategic direction, it would be difficult for any library to make any sustained effort in staffing and resources in supporting digital humanities.

Training Support for Faculty

An important role of libraries in supporting digital humanities is to offer training support to faculty, which has become increasingly important as it can open up rich opportunities for new “intellectual space” to explore new methodologies and create new modes of scholarship (Green, 2014, p. 219). Librarians have taken an increasingly active role, not only in offering digital humanities tools to scholars, but also in training them on how to best utilize these resources to accomplish their research goals. For example, many institutions use Omeka as a digital platform to support digital humanities work. This tool, not only allows archiving and dissemination of research output, but also the flexibility for scholars to create a “community of practitioners” as a digital humanities network (Green, 2014, pp. 222-223). Such tools will enable scholars to explore new areas of research.

While all surveyed Hong Kong institutions indicated they have created or provided access to their digital collections, only one institution has offered training workshops to scholars in the humanities. As research in digital humanities is becoming increasingly important, demand for this kind of support from libraries will become inevitable on university campuses. For Hong Kong institutions, this is an area that still needs much investment, while recognizing the challenges in areas of retooling, repurposing, and staff development, among others.

Faculty-Librarian Partnership and International Collaboration

Establishing partnerships and collaboration between academic libraries and faculty is another important factor that can position libraries in its new role in support of digital humanities and promote the digital humanities movement. Spiro (2011) describes collaboration as a “hallmark” of the digital humanities and connects it to “networked communities and data-driven research” (p. 70). In terms of the type of work librarians are trained to do, libraries are well positioned to take this on. However, collaboration with faculty seems to be the biggest challenge facing all Hong Kong academic libraries, as 75% of survey respondents indicated library-faculty collaboration as a top identified challenge. This figure indicates that actively reaching out to various constituencies at their institutions remains an area ripe for further cultivation.

The area of international collaboration in supporting digital humanities in Hong Kong is wide open and further exploration would be worth the effort. As international research collaboration has increased significantly over the years, Hong Kong academic libraries, as demonstrated in the survey responses are also interested in international collaboration in supporting digital humanities. Some libraries are already involved in collaboration with overseas institutions such as those in the United States, Korea, and

mainland China, although current projects are somewhat limited both in number and in scope. Nonetheless, Hong Kong's academic libraries may need to explore the potential of international involvement further to aim for higher global impact by addressing factors such as project sponsorship, geographic advantages, and promotion for internationalization.

Digital Humanities Centers in Libraries

Another element of digital humanities programs in the United States worth examining is the establishment of digital humanities centers in libraries, such as those at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of Nebraska, the University of Virginia, Brown University, Princeton University, Emory University, and the University of South Carolina. These centers provide a physical space and the necessary tools to make a welcoming facility for scholars and students to do digital humanities research. Work in this area may be best conducted virtually in Hong Kong without allocating a designated space as libraries in the United States have done due to the limitations on physical space. In addition, some scholars have actually challenged the notion of the necessity of allocating a physical space in the library for conducting such work. The conclusion is that support for digital humanities can be addressed in a way that is tailored to the demand and needs of the scholar, as a digital humanities center does not always serve the purpose of meeting the needs of researchers, and when warranted, it is not necessarily best to have it located in the library (Schaffner and Erway, 2014, p. 5).

CHALLENGES

Of all the challenges presented in the survey, building faculty-librarian partnerships at their respective institutions seems to be the most challenging for libraries surveyed. In part, this is because it is still a new concept and field, for librarians as well as scholars. Unlike academic institutions in the United States, where discussions in this area have led to certain institutions actively encouraging librarians and faculty to engage in research collaboration, there is little momentum that has been in place to move this forward in Hong Kong.

A 2009 *Chronicle of Higher Education* blog post discussed the digital humanities as “the first ‘next big thing’ in a long time, because the implications of digital technology affect every field” (Pannapacker, 2009, para. 1). As this area is fast developing and changing, and humanities scholars have deemed the field as the “next big thing in a long time” (Pannapacker, 2009, para. 1), more opportunities have become available for academic libraries to position themselves well to meet the needs of digital humanists by expanding current offerings and promoting knowledge and skills needed to perform such tasks. Those tasks are clearly within the scope of what we do as librarians.

As a scholar and a specialist in digital humanities at the University of California, Los Angeles, Posner provides an insightful description of the range of challenges for librarians to take on when conducting the work of digital humanities. She raises issues that academic library administrations will have to tackle, such as infrastructure, staffing, training, support, workload, lack of incentive, complexity of collaboration with faculty, over cautiousness diffusion of efforts as well as lack of communication, coordination, and commitment (Posner, 2013, pp. 46-49). It would be unfair to say that Hong Kong academic libraries have not considered these challenges in a serious manner. There are several attempts made to address issues of infrastructure, staffing, and other support. One library has reorganized to repurpose a department to institutionalize the support; another has created a targeted position for a digital humanities librarian; still other institutions already have positions in place such as digital scholarship librarian and digital strategies librarian. However, more systematic, organized, and sustainable efforts need to come from Hong Kong academic institutions and funding agencies, both governmental and private, as seen in the United States and Europe. Funding agencies such as the Andrew Mellon Foundation have made it clear that they will support digital humanities projects in areas of digital tools to create literary, visual, and spatial analysis,

the preservation of digital media, publishing and curating scholarly output, and training of scholars and students in tool-based modes of intellectual research (Waters, 2013, p. 8). Hong Kong must follow these trends, which are currently lacking, as a future imperative in order to further promote the development of digital humanities in Hong Kong.

CONCLUSION

This initial study of digital humanities in Hong Kong academic institutions reveals that some efforts have been made by Hong Kong academic libraries to engage in digital humanities. Partnership building between academics and libraries on digital humanities is yet to be developed in spite of a few instances already taking place (e.g., Hong Kong Baptist University and City University of Hong Kong). In most of the survey areas, including the current landscape, project administration, task implementation and operation, assessment, and challenges, there is some level of engagement although quite limited. However, great potential exists for these institutions to move forward in this direction in the future. All but one institution indicated that supporting digital humanities at their institution is very or somewhat important. Also seven out of the eight institutions responded positively to the idea of international collaboration in digital humanities. When asked about future plans, the responses varied significantly. Most libraries indicated no specific future plans were in place. One library indicated its plan was “evolving”; another indicated a possibility of “packaging existing services into a ‘virtual digital humanities centre’”; still others indicated ad hoc projects being taken on.

As momentum is being built in Hong Kong, and scholars and libraries are paying more attention to the growth in the area of digital humanities, challenges that are presented in the survey such as staff training, resource allocation or support, faculty buy-in, librarian faculty collaboration, etc. will have to be addressed. Most importantly, support from the Administration is critical in making any meaningful project in digital humanities successful.

As this study is only a first look at the landscape of digital humanities and academic libraries in Hong Kong, which has provided useful information and meaningful perspectives in regards to the development of digital humanities in the region, it is recommended that a follow-up and more comprehensive study be conducted in a few years to examine the various aspects and developments of how academic libraries are working in support of digital humanities in Hong Kong more in depth. Further studies of academic libraries in Hong Kong comparing them with their international peers in the development of digital humanities would also be useful to better position Hong Kong academic libraries in the development of digital humanities on the global stage.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Academic Libraries: Libraries that are attached to and purposed to serve their parent higher education institutions.

International Collaborations: Any collaborative attempt or project across countries and regions in terms of digital humanities.

Hong Kong: A Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

Survey Analysis: To provide an analytical report of the survey that was sent to all Hong Kong academic libraries.

Environmental Scan: To provide an overview and a broader analysis of digital humanities initiatives in Hong Kong.

Comparison Study: To assess and compare the state of digital humanities between Hong Kong and the United States, using survey findings and literature.

Faculty-Librarian Partnership: The collaborative partnership developed between faculty members and librarians in the same institution for the purpose of digital humanities initiatives.

APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONS

A. BACKGROUND OF THE INSTITUTION

A1. Which of the following best describes your institution?

- A research university
- An undergraduate university
- A liberal arts college
- Other type, please describe

Please describe: _____

A2. Are there digital humanities services provided outside the library?

- Yes
- No
- No, but it is under planning

A3. If yes or under planning, which strategies does your institution use? Check all that apply.

- The institution hosts a center dedicated to support digital humanities or digital scholarship
- The institution offers central funding to support these services
- Individual academic departments host a center dedicated to digital humanities or digital scholarship
- Individual academic departments offer funding to support these services
- Other strategy, please describe

Please describe: _____

B. ADMINISTRATION

B1. Please indicate the level of importance of supporting digital humanities in the current planning of your library.

- 5 Very Important
- 4 Important
- 3 Somewhat Important

2 Somewhat Unimportant

1 Very Unimportant

Please elaborate: _____

B2. Does the vision or mission statement of your library mention its support for digital humanities or digital scholarship?

Yes

No

No, but it is under planning

Please describe: _____

B3. Does your library have a policy or written statement describing the ways in which it supports digital humanities?

Yes

No

No, but it is under planning

Please describe: _____

B4. How many FTE staff are serving in your library?

_____ professional staff

_____ para-professional staff

B5. Are there any library staff positions or library units designated to support this service?

Dedicated staff

Designated unit/department

Staff are called on an ad hoc basis

This service is not provided currently

Please describe: _____

C. OPERATIONS:

C1. Please indicate what types of services or activities your library is offering to support digital humanities. Check all that apply.

Creates access to digital collections as scholarly or teaching resources, in collaboration with faculty

Creates or provides tools for faculty or students to build digital collections, manage research processes, manage research data, etc.

Offers digital humanities training

Offers programs, conferences, or seminars on digital humanities topics

Conducts research in digital humanities or digital scholarship

Supports grant applications for digital humanities projects

Provides a designated space to support digital humanities

Other activity, please describe

Please describe: _____

C2. Which academic departments or administrative units have formed partnerships with your library on digital humanities projects?

C3. Has the library formed partnerships with other institutions or entities to provide digital humanities services?

- Yes
- No
- No, but it is under planning

Please describe: _____

C4. Has the library participated in digital humanities projects that involve international collaboration?

- Yes
- No
- No, but it is under planning

Please describe: _____

C5. What is the source of funding for digital humanities projects? Check all that apply.

- University operating budget
- Library operating budget
- Academic departments
- Special one-time funds
- Grants
- Other source, please describe

Please describe: _____

D. ASSESSMENT:

D1. Are there any guidelines or rubrics in place to assess the effectiveness of the digital humanities services?

- Yes
- No
- No, but it is under planning

D2. If yes or under planning, what measures are/will be used to assess these services?

- Achievement of learning outcomes
- Usage (*e.g., number of visits on online projects, number of attendance of events*)
- Demand (*e.g., increase in demand*)
- Publications or media coverage (*e.g., research or non-research publications about the projects*)
- User surveys
- Faculty compliments
- Other measure, please describe

Please describe: _____

D3. How would you assess the effectiveness of your library's digital humanities services? Please share actual data if available.

E. CHALLENGES:

E1. Please describe the top three challenges that your library had encountered or foresees in supporting digital humanities.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

F. FORWARD-LOOKING QUESTIONS:

F1. Please indicate the projected level of importance of supporting digital humanities after three years from now.

- 5 Very Important
- 4 Important
- 3 Somewhat Important
- 2 Somewhat Unimportant
- 1 Very Unimportant

Please elaborate: _____

F2. Does your library welcome / encourage / facilitate international collaborations on digital humanities projects?

- Yes
- No

Please elaborate: _____

F3. Does your library have any future plans or visionary thoughts regarding digital humanities support?

ⁱ Three libraries selected the choice “This service is not provided currently” when they were asked about staffing. Two of them are actually providing digital humanities support, but they do not perceive their support as a developed or formulated service. In order to better reflect their actual staffing model, the answers of these two libraries were changed to “Staff are called on an ad hoc basis.”