Chapter 8

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

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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, partnership opportunities, etc. 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, and they embrace 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.

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).

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