

# Language and the Subjects of Study in the Digital Humanities

Simon Mahony

**摘要:** 本文主要探讨与西方语境中的数字人文相关的一些问题,它聚焦于以文本为基础的数字人文学术和作为学术媒介的英语自身,属于正在更大范围内兴起的数字人文倡议的一部分。这些倡议关注数字人文研究如何由英语语系主导向更多的包容性和多样性发展的大趋势。文章对数字人文研究中某些地域(如中国大陆)的缺席原因提出了疑问,也致力于思考如何采取积极步骤让更多的地域参与进来,从而创造一种真正全球化的数字人文来让所有人获益。

**关键词:** 数字人文; 多元化; 沟通; 合作; 全球性

**Abstract:** This article considers some of the problems associated with the development of the digital humanities in the Western sphere with a focus on text-based scholarship and the English language. It is part of growing initiatives which seek to address concerns about the anglophone dominance within digital humanities and move towards greater inclusivity and diversity. It seeks to ask questions about the causes of the clear lack of engagement with some geographical areas (here considering mainland China) and how we might make positive steps to bring us all together to create a truly global digital humanities to the benefit of us all.

**Key words:** digital humanities; diversity; communication; collaboration; global

**About the Author:** Professor Simon Mahony is Director of University College London (UCL) Centre for Digital Humanities and Professorial Teaching Fellow in Digital Humanities at the Department of Information Studies, UCL. Research Interests: Digital Humanities. E-mail: s.mahony@ucl.ac.uk.

DOI:10.16234/j.cnki.cn31-1694/i.2020.01.011

## Introduction

The field that has become known as the digital humanities has not somehow sprung into existence in isolation but rather it has developed and grown out of a movement within existing scholarship. This movement brought together researchers and practitioners from a variety of disciplines to progress work and develop methodologies at the intersection of technology and the humanities, firstly within aspects of applied computing in the humanities and then humanities computing. The term digital humanities itself could arguably be said to have become established in the early 2000's and consolidated by the publication of the Schreibman, Sie-

mens and Unsworth edited volume *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (Wiley 2004) and at the same time by the name chosen for the newly launched ADHO <sup>①</sup>, Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations, which resulted from the coming together and combining of the Association of Literary and Linguistic Computing and the Association for Computers in the Humanities. To an extent this signalled the move away from what might be understood as the more traditional application of computing to humanities material (considered as a tool to aid the humanities scholar in their research) and prompted much debate about the nature and definition of digital humanities by its practitioners. What became clear was that what had previously been known as Humanities Computing had a clear and more complete focus such as on informatics, building on the traditions of textual and language-based scholarship; Digital Humanities, however, was far less limited and encompassed a much broader vision for the inclusion of all digital scholarship within the humanities. This wider vision and the possibilities it facilitates are indeed acknowledged by the authors of the *Companion to Digital Humanities*:

[...]there are central concerns among digital humanists which cross disciplinary boundaries. This is nowhere more evident than in the representation of knowledge-bearing artifacts. The process of such representation — especially so when done with the attention to detail and the consistency demanded by the computing environment — requires humanists to make explicit what they know about their material [...]. Ultimately, in computer-assisted analysis of large amounts of material that has been encoded and processed according to a rigorous, well thought-out system of knowledge representation, one is connections, and absences that a human being, unaided by the computer, would not be likely to find. (Schreibman et al, 2004: xxvi)

The introductory chapter in Nyhan and Flinn (2016), *Computation and the Humanities: Towards an Oral History of Digital Humanities*, outlines a comprehensive summary of the growth of digital humanities. The title, nevertheless, is somewhat indicative of fundamental issues within the establishment of digital humanities and that is the link between and the relationship of computers and the humanities themselves. They too acknowledge the difficulties in defining this field but begin by stating that in their view,

[...] it takes place at the intersection of computing and cultural heritage. It aims to transform how the artefacts (such as manuscripts) and the phenomena (such as attitudes) that the Humanities study can be encountered, transmitted, questioned, interpreted, problematized and imagined. In doing so it tends to differentiate itself from now routine uses of computing in research and teaching, for example, email and word processing. (Nyhan and Flinn 1)

---

① <https://adho.org>.

The important point is that here the computer is not used solely as a tool to aid the scholar (that would be applied computing) but becomes part of the research process itself. For me the defining element of the digital humanities is that it is a field in which technology and humanistic study come together to mutually benefit from each other with research projects that are of intellectual interest to both parties. It results in scholarship that would not otherwise be possible. In digital humanities, neither discipline (nor practitioner) is the servant of the other but rather both share in advancing their own specific research agendas. Some scholars attempt to put constraints on the field: Stephen Ramsay requires practitioners to code to qualify as a digital humanist “If you are not making anything, you are not [...] a digital humanist” (Ramsay). Others point to a perceived lack of theory (Liu, Rockwell 2011) as an instrument of definition. Indeed, a volume edited by my colleagues (and soon to be published in Chinese) titled *Defining Digital Humanities* (Terras, Nyhan and Vanhoutte) similarly points to the wide ranging debate but self-consciously, and in conflict with the title, the editors “do not try to define digital humanities [themselves]” but rather “highlight the range of discussions that attempt to scope out the limits and purview of the discipline” (Terras et al. 7). They do this by bringing together a collection of some of the core readings that we give to our students on digital humanities programmes to encourage them to think with and around what it is that we do.

Regardless of whether or not we define what it is that we do when we say that we are a digital humanist, this encourages reflection; reflection on what it is that we do and how we conceptualise this. Another way to look at this and one that I have argued elsewhere (Mahony, 2018) is that once you buy into a specific definition of what constitutes a field or discipline, you are, at the same time, saying what it is not. And in that way, you are being exclusive rather than inclusive, excluding rather than including. I prefer to see the digital humanities as a self-identifying community (Mahony, 2017) and hence prefer not to suggest any definition which would then become divisive but rather to keep things open. Nevertheless, in reality, how inclusive are we in the digital humanities and to what extent do we represent a community? These are some of the questions to be explored here and the motivation for the talk I gave at the University of Nanjing that prompted the writing of this article (my thanks to the organisers for the kind invitation to visit and their outstanding hospitality).

## Institutional Context

If the digital humanities is indeed an academic field, how does that manifest itself in the institutional context and how does it become a community? Further, how does this influence the wider aspects of digital humanities practice? There are different aspects and approaches and I can only write according to my experiences and research (and that is of teaching and working in the UK Higher Education sector for the last two decades — hence, a Western anglophone coloured experience) rather than offering any definitive answer. In my own institu-

tion, University College London (UCL), I am currently the director of our Digital Humanities Centre (UCLDH) which was established in 2010.<sup>①</sup> This is a cross-faculty research centre that brings together both people and research in a wide range of disciplines; there is no building, no dedicated office space, no sign over the door which says “Digital Humanities Centre”, just posters and promotional flyers in my office and stickers on my door. UCLDH is a virtual centre; it is made up of people and hence “People” is the uppermost link on the home webpage menu as this, to our mind, is the most important constituent part of the centre. We have members and connections across all parts of UCL and our management team are in the Faculties of Arts and Humanities, Engineering (Computer Science), and The Bartlett School of Architecture (Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis). We have a Digital Humanities Master’s programme (which can award both MA and MSc), which was set up and is directed by members of UCLDH, and PhD research student opportunities to guide and nurture the next generation of digital humanities scholars and practitioners. These are both, however, administered by and so owned by the Department of Information Studies where several of the UCLDH team, including myself, are based. The autonomy of the programme and of UCLDH itself is limited; we act within the constraints of the College, Faculty, Department and our own contracts of work.

As a general principle, we do not seek to own or monopolise digital humanities activities across the college — there is much digital humanities activity that goes on within UCL but outside of UCLDH — but rather to act as a point of focus or a central hub to bring people together to share experiences and expertise. Putting this into a wider context, London is a strong and vibrant focus for digital humanities activities; we have UCLDH at UCL, our near neighbour King’s College London has the Department of Digital Humanities (the first full academic department of digital humanities that grew out of the previously named Centre for Computing in the Humanities, where I worked previously) and we have the School of Advanced Study, at the University of London, with its strong commitment to all things digital, including the appointment of a Professor of Digital Humanities. Together and in partnership, we are in the process of developing cross-London digital humanities events listings and collaborative events to further develop the community aspect of our work.

The digital humanities centres and research groups in the UK are based mainly in the academic faculties. This does not appear to be the case in other countries as became apparent when I attended the International Conference on Library and Digital Humanities at the University Town Library of Shenzhen in December 2017. There the presentations by digital humanities practitioners and researchers from both the USA and China (PRC) showed that they were mostly based in their institutional library rather than in any faculty; this represents a significant difference to the UK where many university libraries have become a service to support research rather than research centres in their own right. What is clear is that many cen-

---

① <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/dh>.

tres, such as the department at King's, grew out of service centres originally set up to support academic research and that many of those in the USA are either associated with or physically based within the university library. For more on this along with examples of the development of digital humanities groups in the UK and the USA see the discussion by Claire Warwick (a former Director of UCLDH) in *Institutional Models for Digital Humanities* (Warwick, 2012).

Further visits to China allowed me to meet, make connections, give presentations and share ideas with digital humanities research groups based in both faculties and libraries. At Peking University (PKU) and the Shanghai Library, the digital humanities research groups are based and work within the context of the library; both with an extensive range of research projects. But this is not the full picture as there has been a digital humanities centre (the first in mainland China) established at the University of Wuhan, School of Information Management, since 2011. In addition, the University of Nanjing has digital humanities research groups in both the School of History and the School of Arts; these then are within the academic faculties rather than the university library. Renmin University too has a digital humanities research group and they are based in the School of Information Resource Management (which is also an iSchool as is the Department of Information Studies at UCL and the School of Information Management at Wuhan). These institutions, mentioned above, are ones that have digital humanities research groups and where I have been honoured to have been invited to visit and to speak to both staff and students.<sup>①</sup> There are, doubtless, many others that I have not yet made contact with but in time, I hope to do so (I have several pending invitations and some that I have not yet been able to fit into my work schedule). The issue here is that the institutional context is not consistent and so the community building and interdisciplinary nature of the activities they are able to conduct are not the same. There is no single pattern or model.

Some centers focus explicitly on digital humanities; some engage the humanities but are organized around media studies, or code studies — disciplines that are increasingly converging with digital humanities. North American centers tend to arise from the bottom up, European and Asian centers from the top down. North American centers tend to focus exclusively on humanities and, sometimes, the interpretive social sciences. European and Asian centers are more likely to be dispersed through the disciplines, or to be organized as virtual rather than physically located centers. (Fraistat 283)

For digital humanities projects, collaboration is essential as no individual scholar or practitioner, working on their own, has all the skills necessary for such an enterprise. This is true of other disciplinary fields as well, but particularly so with the digital humanities. The

---

<sup>①</sup> <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dh>.

institutions within which we operate often praise interdisciplinary working but the structures of university ( maybe the library too , but that is outside of my immediate and personal experience) management and finance put obstacles in the way rather than facilitate such working. Collaborative working is challenging at an institutional level but also on an individual and personal one when we consider the differences in academic cultures , publication expectations ( particularly with regard to advancement) , project management and funding , recruitment and skills training ( Terras , 2010) .

## A Global Digital Humanities?

The institutional contexts for digital humanities teaching and research are varied , and so no single model pervades. The particular issues that this article wishes to address are those around the objects of study and the language that is dominant in digital humanities as understood and practiced in the West; do these serve to unify us as a community or are they obstacles to the cultural and linguistic diversity of our field? How might these be reconciled to lead to the development of a truly global digital humanities movement?

## Objects of Study

As noted above , the field of digital humanities has grown out of the antecedents formed by humanities computing and , before that , applied computing in the humanities , although with a renewed focus. This lineage , however has strong roots in linguistic and textual scholarship . The field itself looks back to Father Roberto Busa and his collaborations with IBM , dating back to the late 1940' s ( Busa) , and his creation of an *index variorum* of the combined works of Thomas Aquinas , a corpus of medieval Latin texts. There are alternative foundational narratives ( see Rockwell , 2007; Nyhan and Flinn) but , nevertheless , early projects involving computational methods and humanities material came for the most part out of the disciplines of Classics and Medieval studies ( Brunner; Bodard and Mahony , 2008; Mahony , 2018) ; these scholars were very much at the forefront of the application of computing to their data-intensive research projects. Often , by their nature , the corpora of ancient sources were limited , and so more manageable , and the scholars themselves were trained in the study and interrogation of a variety of source materials and hence interdisciplinary by training and recognising the need to collaborate. These early data sources , nevertheless , were primarily text-based and derived from original material found inscribed on stone , written on papyrus , parchment or paper. Whether this was the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* , the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* dating back to 1972 , or the more recent *Chicago Homer* , the *Suda Online* or *Inscriptions of Aphrodisias* or those of *Roman Tripolitania* , these all make use of text-based data as the foundation for their research. These are examples of the language and

text-based scholarship that is mentioned above.

Looking through recent self-defined digital humanities publications such as *A New Companion to Digital Humanities* (Schreibman et al, 2016) and *Digital Humanities* (Berry and Fagerjord), it is clear that the field is now much wider and indeed now concerned with subjects such as infrastructures, analysis dissemination, knowledge representation, and self-reflective criticism. How is it that we know what it is that we know and how do we understand what it is that we do under our banner or within our so-called big-tent that is the digital humanities?

Within my own institution, looking at research taking place within UCLDH, it is wide ranging and various without any one single focus or dominant methodology. The Nyhan and Flinn volume mentioned above takes an oral-history approach to uncover previously unwritten hidden histories of the digital humanities and to reflect on its contested nature by recording interviews with early adopters, scholars and practitioners (Nyhan and Flinn 11). There are imaging projects using non-invasive and non-destructive techniques to uncover texts otherwise not visible in degraded manuscripts and on the papyri used to fill Egyptian coffins; collaborations between our advanced imaging experts and the UCL Library Special Collections using the facilities of our dedicated multi-modal digitisation suite equipped with multispectral and reflectance transformation imaging capabilities;<sup>①</sup> optical character recognition for handwritten manuscripts feeding into machine-learning and artificial intelligence research; and many more. Even within textual scholarship, the digital humanities approach and techniques used at UCLDH allow for new opportunities to study text in innovative ways. I myself have PhD students working, among other things, on standards for best practice and recommendations for the production of digital editions of texts, the electronic editing of texts, user studies and their requirements for digital editions; using microblogging (Twitter) as source data to construct the intellectual and social structures of digital humanities scholars and practitioners, using citation and social network analysis; understanding how recommender systems might enhance the experience of museum visitors; information privacy and self-disclosure on social media. In these instances, text may be the primary source data but in all cases the projects have moved away from the traditional and long-established traditions of textual studies. They make use of text as source data in new and innovative ways.

Digital humanities may still place substantial importance on text as an area of research but the overall focus on text within the field appears to be on the decline. Scott Weingart analysed the keywords selected by authors from a controlled-vocabulary supplied by the organisers for their proposal submissions for DH2016, the international ADHO digital humanities conference held that year in Krakow, Poland. This showed that text-related topics did indeed dominate the declared topics (according to the keywords) but that historical studies, text-mining, archives and data visualisation were all on the increase with a new category of

---

① [www.ucl.ac.uk/dh/projects/digisuite-speccoll](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dh/projects/digisuite-speccoll).

“Digital Humanities — Diversity” being added that year ( Weingart) . Along with the move away from a focus on text and linguistic based research , there appears to be a growing interest ( or maybe concern) over aspects of “diversity” within the digital humanities within the ADHO sphere itself.

## **Hegemony of Language**

The early projects mentioned above as the pioneering early movers in the West ( by which I mean , Europe and North American) applying computational methods to the study of humanities material are all using Ancient Greek or Latin texts . These are the heritage languages of European and Western culture and we look back to Greco-Roman antiquity , their art , architecture , literature and philosophy as the foundational works on which our culture is built. As these are , to some extent , a defined and hence more manageable corpus , this may not be unexpected and particularly so in a geographical area where a classical education was seen as the benchmark of a scholar.

Any study of European literature and thought [...] needs to begin with Greece and Rome , and the study of the classics helps to unite the modern man not only with the men of the ancient world but with all those who in later centuries learned from them. ( Clarke 177)

Further , this area of scholarship ( the study of Greco-Roman antiquity) requires the ability to work with a variety of sources whether those be archaeological , epigraphic , art historical or linguistic and hence the training and experience of practitioners in this rich field has always been interdisciplinary. Thus , adding the efficiencies of computational technologies with the advent of more affordable and usable computing , when it became available , was a logical next step. Indeed , Digital Classicists have always been at the forefront of digital humanities research ( Terras , 2010; Bodard and Mahony , 2010) . Digital classics continues to be a vibrant and innovative research area , a significant sub-set of digital humanities , that brings together practitioners from a range of disciplines to work together collaboratively. It is this collaboration and the creation of partnerships with an inclusive rather than exclusive vision that allows for diversity and a widening sphere of interests ( Mahony , 2017) .

Diversity of language ( or the lack of it) is a limiting factor in growth and collaboration in any disciplinary field. Without it we remain in our own echo chamber , speaking and having discussions only within the limits of our linguistic parameters . Within the digital humanities we are seeing moves towards widening the spectrum of languages to affect greater diversity and inclusivity. When we study humanities , we study the human condition , what it is to be human and the things that make life worthwhile; we study human achievement: art , literature , philosophy as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of ourselves and humanity more



widely. Limiting the languages of communication and collaboration limits our ability to encompass all of human achievement. In this way we limit ourselves.

The development of digital humanities in the West has historically grown in an environment that is dominated, to a large extent, by the English language. The computer systems that we rely on with their ones and zeros respond to and are dominated by the American Standard for Information Exchange (the ASCII code); they display browser pages encoded in HTML with their US-English defined and limited element sets; transfer data marked-up in the ubiquitous XML with its preference for non-accented characters, scripts that travel across the screen from left to right, and the English based TEI guidelines. English is very much the language of the Internet and has become the *lingua franca* of the web. Our domain names are administered by the US based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and currently only available in Latin characters; these are now being extended with the New Generic Top-Level Domains to include non-Latin characters, although only those that are included in the Anglo/US-centric Unicode ①. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), founded by Tim Berners-Lee at MIT, works on guidelines and standards for the ever-developing web.

Moreover, the long-established digital humanities associations and portals such as ADHO and centerNet are based in the UK and the USA. In addition, the major digital humanities journals are also published predominantly in English: *Computers and the Humanities*, *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* (formerly known as *Literary and Linguistic Computing*), and *Digital Humanities Quarterly*. To have your research read and disseminated widely, there is much pressure to publish in English and this leads to a distortion in the publication metrics which further problematises matters. By driving more researchers to publish in English this results in a pronounced bias towards this language as the one favoured for publication. This problem is not limited to the digital humanities but to Western scholarship more generally as many of the highest rated international journals only publish in English (for example see the current issue of *Nature*, www.nature.com). The pressure for publication citations (other publications that cite your work) and the impact of research and its assessment leads to this hegemony of language if you wish for your work to be read widely. In the West, to have your published work widely circulated and read so that it will lead to more citations, it is necessary to publish in English, regardless of your native language. This is essential under the current (Western) model for academic advancement and promotion. The same is often true of major international conferences. Within the field of digital humanities, we are seeing a realisation of the bias towards the English language both in publications and conferences.

The over-representation of US and UK Humanities titles [as counted in major indices

---

① <https://newgtlds.icann.org>.

such as Scopus and Web of Science] will always support arguments in favor of using English as the lingua franca , and the misrepresentation of knowledge production and geopolitical imbalance will continue to thrive. ( Fioromonte , 2015) .

This bias is self-perpetuating and need to be broken if we are to encourage diversity and the building of wider academic communities.

As a move towards this , UCL , along with many other institutions , is a signatory to DO-RA , the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment <sup>①</sup> which seeks to change the way in which scholarly research is evaluated. Previously much weight was attached to the publication venue with metrics being used to evaluate staff and research performance ( that would lead to advancement and promotion) ; the initiative here is that research should be evaluated and assessed according to its own merits rather than on the basis of where it is published. The idea is to avoid what currently seems to be a skewed and biased system that significantly disadvantages early career researchers and academics from less well funded institutions in favour of more established academics and those in prestigious and more well-funded institutions. It is a move towards having a wider range of acceptable publication venues and more diversity in the languages of publication.

## **Towards Diversity in Language within the Digital Humanities**

The initiative to facilitate the move away from the reliance on publication venue and bibliometric approaches to assess the quality of scholarly output is one that is fully supported by the major funders of research in the UK and Europe: the European Commission , the Wellcome Trust and the ( UK ) Higher Education Funding Council for England. This should go some way to supporting the inclusion of a wider range and diversity of publishing venues for research output more generally rather than being specific to any one field of practice. This section highlights some movement specific to digital humanities.

As a scholarly field and community , we in the digital humanities need to be moving beyond previous linguistically imposed geographic boundaries. As above , the major ( Western ) digital humanities publications are based in the UK and North America. Our umbrella organisation ( ADHO ) incorporates European , Canadian , Australasian , Japanese , French , and Southern African member associations. A recent new addition is the Taiwanese Association for Digital Humanity ( TADH ) which was founded in 2016, “to strengthen the digital humanities research communities in Taiwan” , and became a member of ADHO in 2018; <sup>②</sup> they publish the *Journal of Digital Archives and Digital Humanities*<sup>③</sup> and host a conference of the same

---

① <https://sfdora.org>.

② <https://adho.org>.

③ <http://tadh.org.tw/>.

name.

Another member association of ADHO is centerNet which describes itself as “an international network of digital humanities centers formed for cooperation and collaborative action to benefit digital humanities and allied fields [...]”<sup>①</sup>. centerNet has its members geolocated on a map which shows a clear preponderance of Western Europe and North America with only a very few outliers.<sup>②</sup> The Center for Digital Humanities at Wuhan<sup>③</sup> is listed on the centerNet pages but does not appear on the map which shows a distinctly empty space for East Asia, other than markers for Japan, Chinese Taiwan and Hong Kong. Our “global” digital humanities community is hardly then global, especially when there is so much important activity within the field in mainland China. Nevertheless, there is a clear movement resulting from concerns over our lack of diversity and East Asia is not the only under represented area; other countries that are engaging in digital humanities research and projects, such as India, are similarly not represented in our global networks.

The ADHO annual conference traditionally alternated between a venue in Europe and North America; it was held for the first time outside this circle at Sydney in 2015 (although still an anglophone area) with the professed theme of *Global Digital Humanities*<sup>④</sup>. Two years prior to this at the 2013 ADHO conference hosted by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, USA, the closing keynote was given by Isabell Galina Russell (an Honorary Research Fellow at UCLDH where she completed her PhD) from the Institute for Bibliographic Studies at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM. With the title, *Is There Anybody Out There? Building a Global Digital Humanities Community*, she articulated some of the issues of fundamental concern:

One of the things that characterizes DH[...] is that the community has worked very hard towards building the DH community. And most of this work has come from enthusiastic and generous scholars who have given much of their time to developing it. [...] This community has traditionally viewed itself [...] as welcoming and open. Collaboration and cooperation are seen as specific traits of DH that differentiate it from the more “lone-scholar” traditional humanist. It seems to be that openness and a desire to work with others is fundamental to the way we think of ourselves. And yet, over the past few years this community has become aware that this isn’t so open, universal as it thought it was (Galina).

It came as no surprise, then, that when the 2018 ADHO conference was hosted by UNAM in

---

① <https://dhcenternet.org>.

② <https://dhcenternet.org/centers>.

③ <http://dh.whu.edu.cn/dh/web>.

④ <http://dh2015.org>.

Mexico City , with Galina as one of the local organisers , they took a more multi-lingual and inclusive language approach. This was the first time that the ADHO conference had been hosted in Latin America and the Global South. With the strapline “PUENTES/BRIDGES” , the information on the conference call-for-papers webpage was in German , English , Spanish , French , Italian , and Portuguese; the organisers were accepting proposals in those languages although limiting the official languages of the conference to Spanish and English.<sup>①</sup> The Mexican digital humanities community has an established organisation Red de Humanidades Digitales ( RedHD ) , now also a member of ADHO ( [www.humanidadesdigitales.net](http://www.humanidadesdigitales.net) ) , with its own publication in Spanish , although also not listed by or connected to centerNet. They have a clear bi-lingual statement of purpose on their webpages:

Our aims are to promote and strengthen work on the humanities and computing , with special emphasis on teaching and research in Latin America. The RedHD supports better communication between digital humanists in the region , the formation of human resources , preparation and documentation of good practices , the promotion of DH projects , dissemination of DH related events as well as promoting the recognition of the field. Additionally we seek to promote regional projects and initiatives on an international level. <sup>②</sup>

Many of the languages listed for the 2018 ADHO conference proposals have a common root. Mexican Spanish is , of course , a variety of the Spanish language , and also common to some parts of the USA , but it is still a Romance language — part of the Indo-European family and stemming from the common Latin Vulgate of much of Europe during and after the Roman period. This is in contrast to English with its mix of Anglo-Saxon , French , and Latin , while although also being part of the Indo-European family is generally classified as Germanic in origin. Despite this , because of the issues raised above , the English language dominates Western digital humanities publications and digital scholarly discourse ( Meester ) .

The dominance of any language is a barrier to inclusivity and , as Galina points out , we in the digital humanities community are questioning this . There is indeed a global initiative within ADHO itself , GO::DH ( Global Outlook::Digital Humanities , [www.globaloutlookdh.org](http://www.globaloutlookdh.org) ) , which is a Special Interest Group ( SIG ) specifically seeking to:

[...] help break down barriers that hinder communication and collaboration among researchers and students of the Digital Arts , Humanities , and Cultural Heritage sectors in high , mid , and low income economies [...] Its core activities are Discovery , Communi-

---

① <https://dh2018.adho.org>.

② [www.humanidadesdigitales.net/acerca-de/](http://www.humanidadesdigitales.net/acerca-de/).

ty-Building , Research , and Advocacy.<sup>①</sup>

From this statement we can see that they are seeking to close the communication gap between developed and less-developed regions as well any other barriers to communication and collaboration. As part of their mission to bring linguistic diversity , their online pages have translation links for: English , Chinese ( both Simplified and Traditional) , French , Italian , Spanish , Arabic , Nepali , and Brazilian Portuguese.

In addition to this ADHO has its own Multi-lingualism and Multi-culturalism Committee ( MLMC) with a wide range of nationalities represented along with policy and objectives statements to help members “to become more linguistically and culturally inclusive in general terms , and especially in the areas where linguistic and cultural matters play a role”<sup>②</sup>. There is clearly a growing awareness for the need to be more inclusive within the digital humanities with regard to diversity and particularly for that of language.

The centrality of ADHO to digital Humanities in the West and the dominant English language journals , mentioned earlier , may , despite their efforts , engender perceived tensions of another kind. From those members organisations , they perhaps encourage a very Western point of view with us ( the anglophone digital humanities sphere) being at the centre and everyone else being at the periphery and representing outliers. Amy Earhart , herself a member of GO::DH , suggests alternative possibilities:

Instead of insisting that we encapsulate all practices of digital humanities within a big tent or a centralized structure , we should instead view ADHO and its conferences and journals as important , but not central , meeting spaces for digital humanists. Rather than seeing ADHO as the center , we should encourage a global digital humanities that works on the borderlands , with localized expressions of scholarship that reinvigorate through exchange. [...]

[This] is the only way that we might move beyond binaries that are currently in place , whether technologically advanced/primitive , east/west , or low income/high income. Resisting the homogenization of scholarly methods , questions , outcomes , production and ownership is the only way to develop a truly robust global digital humanities. ( Earhart 368)

To press this argument further , we have a very Western centric and focused set of organisations and structures that we consider to be central to digital humanities as we ( in the West) perceive it. We are understanding now that these are not as inclusive , open and universal as

---

① [www.globaloutlookdh.org](http://www.globaloutlookdh.org).

② <https://adho.org/administration/multi-lingualism-multi-culturalism>

we had intended. Beyond language differences, Domenico Fiormonte points to perceived tensions between methodological differences within the anglophone sphere itself as well as endemic geopolitics (Fiormonte, 2012). Even within Europe there are tensions over the language of publication and objects of our study. For example, Italy has a long tradition of *Informatica Umanistica* (including the continuing work of the research centre founded by Roberto Busa in Milan) and yet we hear little about their activities in the major digital humanities publications. The Italian Association of Digital Humanities now has their own journal, *Umanistica Digitale*, with the latest publications mostly in Italian rather than English.<sup>①</sup>

In East Asia there are members of both ADHO and centerNet, although the PRC is absent, with one exception, despite having many successful digital humanities research groups, active centres, and international conferences. It would seem reasonable to question the apparent lack of engagement of the West with mainland China despite their thriving centres and research groups. This is particularly so when we consider the long history of the application of computational techniques and methodologies to humanities material in the PRC that can be traced back through the 1970's (the Chinese version of the standard for machine reaching of library catalogues, MARC — CNMARC), the 1980's (Chinese Character Codes for Information Exchange — GB2312-80), the 1990's with Digital Dunhuang, and in the 2000's with CBDB (China Bibliographic Database) and the Chinese Text Project. There have been many more high-profile projects in the PRC applying computational technologies to historical and heritage material.

The question to raise and reflect on here is whether we in the West should be sitting back and expecting those self-identifying digital humanities researchers and groups in the PRC and other Asian regions to join what might be perceived as a Western focused organisation. Alternatively, should we in the West be moving away from notions of a centralised structure, as suggested by Earhart, with its “distinct bias towards North American and European notions of culture, value and ownership” (Earhart 357), and embrace diversity through more regional networks of what she refers to as “localized borderlands”? Perhaps “the region is less important than other forms of constituency as an organising principle” for the digital humanities (O'Donnell et al 500). The developing relationships between individuals in different geographic regions and their personal networks may be a better model.

Nevertheless, one size never fits all and maybe we should consider a more federal approach, particularly as there is no single accepted definition of the field which, as argued above, should be avoided as that may lead to exclusion rather than inclusion. There are, of course, notable examples of collaboration between East and West and projects that focus on Chinese literature and culture: the Harvard connection goes back to John King Fairbank and

---

<sup>①</sup> <https://umanisticadigitale.unibo.it>.

the Centre for Chinese Studies<sup>①</sup>, the China Bibliographic Database Project<sup>②</sup> and the Chinese Text Project<sup>③</sup>. The British Library partners the International Dunhuang Project: The Silk Road Online<sup>④</sup>.

Beyond digital humanities and in academia more widely there is a growing awareness of the need for language acquisition to engage more fully with the East. In my own institution and as part of the UCL Institute of Education we have the Confucius Institute, opened in 2015, “supporting the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese and the study of China across other areas of the curriculum”<sup>⑤</sup>. Our near neighbours, King’s College London now has the Lau China Institute for the study of contemporary China.<sup>⑥</sup>

## Conclusion

This article takes its starting point from concerns and questions about the apparent lack (with notable exceptions) of Western engagement with the extensive digital humanities research, projects, and centres in mainland China. It is part of growing initiatives which seek to address concerns about the anglophone dominance within digital humanities, to move towards greater inclusivity and diversity, and to consider how we might make positive steps to bring us all together to create a truly global digital humanities to the benefit of us all.

There have been changes, within digital humanities more broadly and certainly within UCLDH, in the objects of our study and a move away from the traditional text-based scholarship into new areas of advanced imaging techniques, machine-learning, and artificial intelligence; where we study text, we do so in new and very different ways such as oral-histories, network and discourse analysis.

We are developing new practices for publication that do not rely on the venue but rather on the quality of research output to give more diversity of outlets. These, described earlier, would particularly help junior researchers and those from less well-funded and less prestigious institutions. What is perhaps also needed is more work being put into translations for published works; we have translated webpages such as the ADHO conference calls and GO::DH information pages, but what is needed is for funders to agree to cover the cost of translation, as they already do for conference and publication fees, so that the research output they publish could be read more widely.

Widening the geographical areas and language support in the form of live-translation and

---

① <http://fairbank.fas.harvard.edu>.

② <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cbdb>.

③ <http://ctext.org>.

④ <http://idp.bl.uk>.

⑤ [www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-centres/centres/ioe-confucius-institute-for-schools](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-centres/centres/ioe-confucius-institute-for-schools).

⑥ [www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/lci](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/lci).

“whispering translators” would make conference attendance more accessible for visitors from other countries. The level of conference fees, to enable participation from regions that are less economically developed and financially advantaged, could do with examination to democratise attendance. The current ADHO model favours participation from prestigious institutions and high-economy countries; for example:

[...]at the 2016 digital humanities conference in Krakow participants from Poland reported that the registration costs of the conference were equivalent to a month of salary for lecturers. Though the conference was in their home country, the cost was prohibitive. ( Earhart 362–363)

We all work in an institutional context and so support for our activities from our institution is essential. Travel budgets for academic staff as well as facilities and funds for hosting visiting scholars and researchers would allow for the exchange of ideas and the start of further projects and collaborations. Without communication there can be no collaboration, which is the essential constituent in digital humanities research and practice. Communication and collaboration involve people, which is why the most important asset of any digital humanities centre or research team is the people that are involved. The format of the working relationship within research groups and centres, regardless of whether they are in faculty or the library, between researchers and practitioners may have a strong resemblance but the way in which this is formalised will differ in each case — there is no one single model. Whatever the formal arrangements:

[...]the mission will be a two fold one: first, to build greater connectivity and collaboration between and across existing centers, resources, and practitioners; and, second, to ensure that we do not lose our pioneering spirit and continue to seek out and explore technologies that will shed fresh light on our cultural heritage and inheritance. In pursuing that mission, building and creating networks is the most important activity of all. We must build alliances with coders, librarians, curators, photographers, archivists, artists, project managers, and all the range of new professions and skills. ( O’Donnell et al 473)

From this discussion centring on diversity within the digital humanities, it is clear that there are legitimate concerns and that to an extent some of these are being addressed with the wider language possibilities and range of conference locations, as well as the work of GO::DH. More could be achieved with additional support from funders and our institutions. It is still, however, “a field in the midst of growing pains as its adherents expand from a small circle of like-minded scholars to a more heterogeneous set of practitioners [...]” ( Gold). Overall, it is the connections and collaborations between these heterogeneous practitioners that will allow



further movement towards greater diversity , whether that be the physicality of geographic region , the balancing of economic advantage , or correcting the imbalance caused by language hegemony. Moreover , to achieve this , we must all be willing to reach out beyond our own echo-chamber of like-minded persons who , however unwillingly , will tend to reinforce our own world view and doubtless share our own biases and unconscious prejudices.

## Works Cited

- Berry , D. and A. Fagerjord. *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press , 2017.
- Bodard , G. and S. Mahony. eds. “‘Though Much is Taken , Much Abides’: Recovering Antiquity through Innovative Digital Methodologies”. *Digital Classicist Special Issue , Digital Medievalist 4* ( 2008) : 29 Jan , 2019. <<https://journal.digitalmedievalist.org/articles/10.16995/dm.17>>.
- eds. *Digital Research in the Study of Classical Antiquity*. London: Ashgate 2010.
- Brunner , T. F.. “Classics and the Computer: The History of a Relationship”. *Accessing Antiquity: The Computerization of Classical Studies*. Ed.J. Solomon. Tucson: University of Arizona Press , 1993.10–33.
- Busa , R.. “The Annals of Humanities Computing: The Index Thomisticus.” *Computers and the Humanities* 14( 1980) : 83–90.
- Clarke , M. L.. *Classical Education in Britain 1500 – 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press , 1959.
- Earhart , A.. “Digital Humanities within a Global Context: Creating Borderlands of Localized Expression”. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11( 2018) : 357–369. Berlin , Heidelberg: Springer.
- Fiorimonte , D.. “Towards a Cultural Critique of the Digital Humanities”. *Historical Social Research* Vol. 37 3 ( 2012) : 59–76. Reprinted in: Matthew Gold and Lauren Klein.eds. *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press , 2012. 438–458.
- “Towards Monoculture ( Digital ) Humanities?”. *Infolet: Culturae criticadei media digitali 7* ( 2015) : 29 January 2019. <<https://infolet.it/2015/07/12/monocultural-humanities>>.
- Fraistat , N.. “The Function of Digital Humanities Centers at the Present Time”. *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2012*. Eds. M. Gold and L. Klein Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press , 2012 . 281–191.
- Galina Russell , I. . “ Is There Anybody Out There? Building a Global Digital Humanities Community”. *Humanidades Digitales*. 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 <http://humanidadesdigitales.net/blog/2013/07/19/is-there-anybody-out-there-building-a-global-digital-humanities-community>.
- Gold , M.. “Introduction: The Digital Humanities Moment”. *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*. Eds. M. Gold and L. Klein. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press , 2012. IX–XVI.
- Liu , A.. “Where is the Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities”. *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016*. Eds. M. Gold and L. Klein. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press , 2011. 490–509.
- Mahony , S.. “The Digital Classicist: Building a Digital Humanities Community”. *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 11: 3( 2017) ; 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/11/3/000335/000335.html>.
- “Cultural Diversity and the Digital Humanities”. *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11 ( 2018) : 371–388. Springer Berlin Heidelberg 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019. <<https://link>.

- springer.com/article/10.1007/s40647-018-0216-0> .Berlin , Heidelberg: Springer.
- Meester , W.. “Towards a Comprehensive Citation Index for the Arts & Humanities”. *Research Trends* 32( 2013) .29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 <https://www.researchtrends.com/issue-32-march-2013/towards-a-comprehensive-citation-index-for-the-arts-humanities>.
- Nyhan , J. and A. Flinn. *Computation and the Humanities: Towards an Oral History of Digital Humanities*. Cham: Springer , 2016.
- O’ Donnell , D. , K. Walter , A. Gil , and N. Fraistat. “Only Connect: The Globalization of the Digital Humanities”. *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*. Eds. Schreibman Siemens and Unsworth. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell , 2016. 493–510.
- Ramsey , S.. “Who’ s In and Who’ s Out” ( 2001) . *Defining Digital Humanities*. Eds. Nyhan Terras and Vanhoutte. Farnham: Ashgate 239– 241 , 2001]. [Note from Simon: this was an online publication that has disappeared but was re-published in this edited volume.]
- Rockwell , G.. “An Alternate Beginning to Humanities Computing?”. *Theoretica.ca.*( 2007) .29<sup>th</sup> January 2019 <<http://theoreti.ca/?p=1608>>.
- . “Inclusion in the Digital Humanities”. *Philosophi.ca* ( 2011) . 29 January 2019<<https://philosophi.ca/pmwiki.php/Main/InclusionInTheDigitalHumanities>>.
- Schreibman , S. , R. Siemens , and J. Unsworth. eds. *A Companion to Digital Humanities*. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell , 2004.
- . eds. *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell , 2016.
- Terras , M.. “The Digital Classicist: Disciplinary Focus an Interdisciplinary Vision”. *Digital Research in the Study of Classical Antiquity*. Eds. Bodard & Mahony. London: Ashgate , 2010. 171–189.
- Terras , M. , J. Nyhan, and Vanhoutte , eds. *Defining Digital Humanities*. London: Ashgate , 2013.
- Warwick , C.. “Institutional Models for Digital Humanities”. *Digital Humanities in Practice*. Eds. Warwick , Terras and Nyhan. London: Facet Publishing , 2012.193–216.
- Weingart , S.. “Submissions to DH2016”. *The Scottbot Irregular*. 29 January 2019 <[http://www.scottbot.net/HIAL/index.html@p=41533.html](http://www.scottbot.net/HIAL/index.html?p=41533.html)>.