

Transnational Connections and Barriers in Digital Humanities

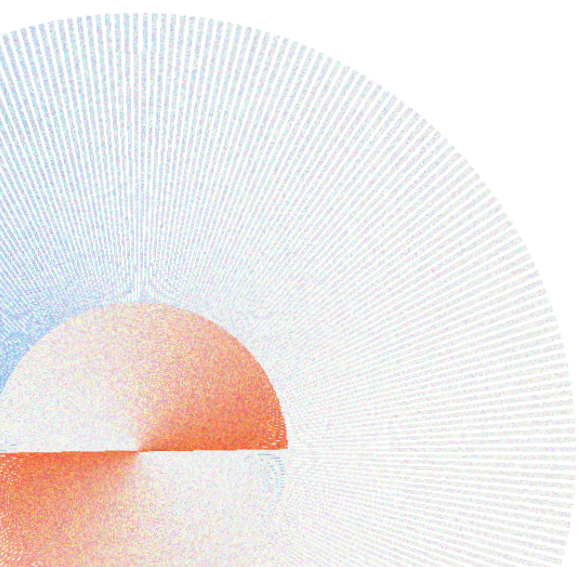
联结与壁垒：
跨越疆界的数字人文



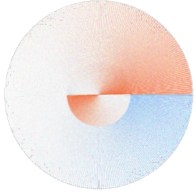
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中-英案例研究
A UK-China Case Study



Transnational connections and barriers in DH: a UK-Chinese case study



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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a comparative study of the digital humanities landscapes in the UK and China, based on a literature review and 45 in-depth interviews with academics, funders, policymakers, and professionals across the cultural and technological sectors. It offers the first large-scale, qualitative cross-national comparison of DH in these two countries and explores how cultural, institutional, and infrastructural contexts shape digital scholarship in the humanities.

The research identifies both shared challenges and divergent trajectories in DH development. While the UK has a longer tradition of DH institutionalisation—rooted in academic departments, project-based innovation, and integration with cultural heritage institutions—China’s DH field has grown rapidly in recent years, influenced by national strategies, infrastructural ambitions, and an increasingly interdisciplinary academic environment.

Key findings include:

- **Diverse understandings of DH:**
UK participants often view DH as experimental, interdisciplinary and practice-based, while Chinese scholars describe a fragmented but rapidly growing field, often shaped by institutional constraints and pragmatic goals.
- **Funding landscapes:**
In the UK, competitive, project-based funding is typical, with expanding support for infrastructure and public engagement. In China, funding is more centralised and strategically aligned with government priorities, especially in cultural heritage and smart technologies.
- **Infrastructure gaps:**
Both countries face challenges in sustaining digital infrastructure. UK stakeholders emphasise interoperability, diversity, access, and sustainability; Chinese participants focus on uneven development, regional disparities, and data standardisation.
- **Professional identity and career paths**
UK scholars have greater recognition of DH roles, though career progression for technical staff remains difficult. In China, DH identities are less formalised, and professional pathways are emerging but uncertain.
- **Collaboration opportunities:**
There is strong interest in UK-China collaboration, but barriers include linguistic divides, lack of shared platforms, limited cross-national funding, and epistemic disconnections in research practice.

The report concludes with strategic recommendations for funders, researchers, universities, and the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAM) sector to strengthen transnational collaboration, build inclusive infrastructures, support emerging professionals, and foster mutual understanding across the UK and China in the digital humanities.

Table of Contents

CONTEXT	6
Introduction	6
Reviewing the context	7
Methodology	10
Summary of interview cohort	11
Limitations and future steps	16
Acknowledgements	17
GENERAL FINDINGS	18
Current state of DH as a field	18
Funding	28
Infrastructure	32
Professionalisation and institutional structures	36
Evaluating digital humanities research	41
Teaching and training	43
THE COMPUTATIONAL TURN	47
Computational humanities	47
Data and collections at scale	48
AI and DH	49
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND OUTCOMES	51
DH and knowledge production	51
RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION	56
Primary countries of collaboration	56
Nature and types of collaboration	57
Barriers and challenges to collaboration	57
Reflections on global DH structures and equity	58
Geopolitical influence on collaborative dynamics	58
COLLABORATIONS BEYOND ACADEMIA	59
Collaborations with the GLAM sector	59
Collaborations beyond academia/with commercial sector	60
GLOBAL VISIBILITY	62
Perceived visibility on the global stage	62
Language and communication	63
COLLABORATION CHINA-UK	65
Context	65
Challenges	65
Opportunities	67
CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS	69
General	69
For Researchers	69
For GLAM institutions	70
For Funders	70
For University administrators	70
For Teachers and programme convenors:	71
APPENDICES	72
Journals mentioned by interviewees	72
Bibliography	72

Introduction

In recent years, the digital humanities (DH) have become increasingly influential in shaping discourse and practice about digital transformations in the humanities (and beyond) through digital tools, methods and research infrastructure. The field increasingly intersects with data science, AI, open science, digitally mediated cultural heritage and wider academic approaches to digital research, often extending into the social sciences and beyond. Digital humanities have gained significant traction in formal academic terms, and yet it also feels like the field is at a turning point in its development – no longer the ‘young disruptor’ it once was, nor a fully established field with stable teaching or research practices.

Despite its global projection, DH has developed unevenly across different parts of the world, and on one level the global divides in its institutional support and infrastructure reflect wider divides in academia, but on the other hand, its role in designing and building knowledge architectures encourages us to focus on the linguistic and cultural influences underpinning digital design in the tools and infrastructures we use. Much of DH literature and infrastructure remains Anglocentric and is dominated by the Global North.

Contemporary studies have attempted to address these global imbalances in the digital humanities from various perspectives (Fiormonte, Chaudhuri and Ricourte, 2022), and to recognise local contexts and ‘accents’ of DH (Risam, 2017). It follows from this that there is also a need for greater understanding of the particular conditions which shape the digital humanities – and digital scholarship in the humanities more generally – in specific countries or regions, so that we can better understand, and act, on the factors affecting global knowledge flows.

Aims and impact

In 2024 we began a bi-national study in order to compare attitudes towards digital humanities identity formation, research infrastructures and professionalisation in UK and China. Our study included literature review, the analysis of DH professional documentation in both countries, and a series of interviews (45 in total) with academics, funders, policy organisations, cultural heritage organisations, publishers and software development companies working in the cultural space.

The general purpose of this study is to explore the specific perceptions, sociotechnical affordances and institutional dynamics which condition researchers’ attitudes towards digital humanities in China and the UK, and to examine how these in turn determine the kind of research they are able to produce. Based on the research we carried out, the aims of this report are to:

- Analyse the current state of the digital humanities in both China and the UK, and to extract wider lessons about the future of digitally mediated scholarship in the humanities and social sciences in both countries.

¹We focus principally on the humanities in this report, although the digital humanities increasingly overlap with social sciences research and beyond.

- Examine the current state of global diversity in infrastructure construction and identify the conditions for more inclusive transnational strategies in the digital humanities.
- Study existing UK and Chinese collaborations in the field, and to assess the requirements and conditions for enhanced collaboration in the field (and more widely in digitally mediated humanities scholarship) in future.

The report will be of general interest to funders, digital practitioners, platform designers, academic policymakers and humanities or social sciences researchers.¹ More specifically, it will benefit both those formally operating within the digital humanities, and other researchers whose work engages with digital transformations in culture and society.

Reviewing the context

There is a danger that a study like this can be introspective and focus too much on the digital humanities as a ‘brand’. There are different opinions on the future roles of the digital humanities in academic research and teaching, but at this moment in time DH represents a useful proxy, not only for broader digital scholarship in the humanities, but also for the kind of collaborative, inter- (or trans-) disciplinary, networked and/or project-based enquiry which increasingly defines the nature of transnational research practice. This study not only outlines some of the main challenges currently facing the digital humanities in the two countries studied; it also addresses unresolved challenges in the relationship between ‘digital’ and more established forms of humanities research practices.

Our study is informed in particular by recent debates on global and linguistic diversity in the digital humanities. Early expressions of ‘global’ digital humanities were strongly Anglophone and rooted in Western academic practices, despite the existence of established DH communities in countries such as Japan and Italy. Critiques of the Global North bias in DH highlighted imbalance across numerous vectors, including internal representation in the field’s professional associations, the design of DH infrastructures and its communicative or publishing practices (Fiormonte, 2012; Dacos, 2013; Gil and Ortega, 2016). These debates led to the creation of the Global Outlook DH (GO::DH) community² as a tactical response to DH’s challenges for inclusion and diversity, and a host of new initiatives aiming at breaking down cultural and linguistic barriers.³

While national and regional DH communities have increasingly emerged all around the world (for example in Latin America, Asia and Africa), these are still under-represented in global DH scholarship.

Both histories and contemporary accounts still tend to favour Anglophone and Global North perspectives on the digital humanities, presented as a set of culturally neutral epistemic practices which however rely on access to high levels of computational resource (whether human or technical) and which still do not ask enough questions about how their tools and data are extracted, designed, analysed and disseminated

² See <http://www.globaloutlookdh.org/>

³ These include the Global Digital Humanities Symposium (<https://msuglobaldh.org/>), or the ADHO (<https://adho.org/sigs/#multilingual-DH>) and DARIAH (<https://www.dariah.eu/activities/working-groups/multilingual-dh/>) multilingual DH groups.

(Afanador-Llach, 2024, Riande, 2024). There has also been relatively little empirical work exploring the specific conditions which determine how knowledge is created in different locales, or the factors shaping regional or national ‘flavours’ of DH. Much early discourse on DH took an implied universalist approach firmly biased towards a Global North/Western, and in particular US-based, scholarly perspective, largely ignoring local context.

Given the long history of British involvement in the digital humanities, it is perhaps surprising that there is relatively little literature on the field’s development in the UK. There is no definitive history of the field in the UK, but early foundations for the field stretch back to the 1960s with many pioneers in literary and linguistic text analysis, for example, being based in the UK. Traces of UK DH history are evident throughout broader histories such as Susan Hockey’s history of what was then called ‘humanities computing’ (Hockey, 2004) or the extensive oral history work carried out by Nyhan and Flinn (2016), but there is little empirical material on the specific nature of the field’s past or present in the UK. Although a few studies exist,⁴ national perspectives on the digital humanities in general are not common, and there is an argument that studying the state of research by topic (such as digital history or geospatial studies) rather than geographic location is more meaningful. But adapting Nyhan and Flynn’s argument that DH’s “lack” of historical self-awareness is “hindering DH’s understanding of itself and what it is that truly makes it distinctive”, we could also argue that understanding its local conditions are an essential part of improving this self-knowledge, and of better articulating what the digital humanities offer to the “wider sea of knowledge” (p. 14).

Our project does not aim to create a history of DH in either country, but a wider study of the impact of historic UK-specific events and initiatives would certainly be welcome. It is an irony that, as Nyhan and Flynn note, the digital humanities as a field has not always been very effective at archiving its own past, despite its strong involvement in digital preservation efforts more generally. Creating an authoritative history of the digital humanities in the UK is beyond the scope of this publication, but Nyhan and Flynn’s account of the establishment structures in global DH demonstrates the early seeds laid in a series of meetings which gradually “began to coalesce” with the annual meetings of the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing (ALLC, which later became the European Association for Digital Humanities) (2016, p. 3).

Afterwards, developments such as the conference proceedings of the Digital Resources for the Humanities (DRH, later DRHA to include ‘Arts’ in the title)⁵ in a ten-year period either side of the turn of the millennium or the AHRC-funded ICT Methods Network resource, activity and publication lists published 2005-2008⁶ demonstrate a strong focus on open, collaborative and humanities-centred digital tools and methods. The establishment in 1996 of the Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS), a centre supporting digital preservation and research management in the humanities, was pioneering for its time, until its closure in 2008. Whereas the project pages of historic institutions such as University of Sheffield’s Digital Humanities Institute demonstrate the strong grounding of UK DH in humanities disciplines,⁷ more recent initiatives have built on a strong computational thread flowing through the field. A 2020 white paper published by the Humanities and data science special interest group of the Alan Turing Institute sets out recommendations for how to foster greater connections between humanities and data science

⁴See, for example, this 2014 series of reviews of the state of the art in the field in Europe: <https://www.hsozkult.de/debate/id/fddebate-132270?title=editorial-the-status-quo-of-digital-humanities-in-europe&recno=202&language=en&page=11&q=&sort=&fq=&total=434>

⁵See <https://web.archive.org/web/20190226084631/http://drh.org.uk/>

⁶See <https://web.archive.org/web/20240228215215/https://www.methodsnetwork.ac.uk/>

⁷See <https://www.dhi.ac.uk/projects/>

(McGillivray et al., 2020), whereas increasingly closer links with the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums sector have helped to shape numerous initiatives (such as the British Library’s LB Labs project or more recently the Towards a National Collection programme - TaNC⁸) and reports (such as the Infrastructure Futures for Digital Cultural Heritage report produced by the University of Edinburgh’s Creative Informatics group (Ross et al., 2024) which both draw on and contribute to digital humanities research.

⁸See <https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/>

⁹See <https://digitalhumanities-uk-ie.org/>

¹⁰See <https://digitalhumanities-uk-ie.org/resources/>

The emergence of the UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association⁹ in recent years has addressed some concerns about the lack of a national professional association for DH in the UK (which will be raised by our interviewees later in this study) and has led to a roadmap and a series of transitional or white papers which address challenges in a number of areas such as capacity building, careers or diversity and inclusion.¹⁰

The origins of Digital Humanities in China can be traced back to the 1980s. Over the past two decades, DH in China has developed rapidly and is now widely recognised as one of the most promising emerging research fields. Several recent publications offer panoramic insights into the development of Digital Humanities in China. These include *The World Humanities Report: Digital Humanities in China, 1980–2020* (Liu, Zhao, and Li, 2024), *Debating and Developing Digital Humanities in China: New or Old?* (Chen & Tsui, 2022), and *Theoretical Evolution and Paradigm Shift of Digital Humanities: From “Digital Approaches for Humanities Research” to “Humanities Research in the Post-digital Era”* (Xia, 2024). The most recent progress can be found in the *Annual Report on the Development of Digital Humanities in China* (《中国数字人文发展报告》), Volume 1, edited by Feng et al., (2024), published by Renmin University of China.

Broadly speaking, DH research in China can be categorised into two major strands: one led by the fields of library, information, and archival science (LIAs), and the other driven by the humanities disciplines themselves. While the research objects, publication venues, and methods of these two camps often overlap—and both focus on the role of digital technologies in humanistic knowledge production—the LIAs-led DH emphasises digital techniques, methodological development, and knowledge management processes. In contrast, humanities-led DH is more concerned with how digital methods can inspire new questions and lead to the generation of novel humanistic insights.

From a global perspective, the development of DH related to China is not limited to mainland institutions. A number of research centres with long-standing Chinese studies traditions have undertaken influential DH projects and developed foundational infrastructures. These include the China Biographical Database Project (CBDB) at Harvard University¹¹; MARKUS at Leiden University¹²; DocuSky at National Taiwan University¹³; and the Local Gazetteers Research Tools (LoGaRT) at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science¹⁴. All of these have had a significant influence on DH in China and through extensive collaboration with mainland scholars, they helped establish the earliest digital humanities communities. For a broader picture of DH beyond the mainland, see *A Review of the Development of Digital Humanities Study in Taiwan (2009–2017)* and Paul Vierthaler’s *Analysis of the State of Chinese Digital Humanities Research in North America and Western Europe* (2018). Although Chinese mainland scholars have increasingly participated in international DH conferences and published papers in recent years, these outputs

¹¹See <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/cbdb>

¹²See <https://dh.chinese-empires.eu/markus/>

¹³See <https://docusky.org.tw/DocuSky/home/>

¹⁴See <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/FS71/LoGaRT/CN>

remain relatively limited compared to the volume of domestic research.

In its early stages, DH research in mainland China primarily focused on introducing Western DH models and surveying overseas Chinese DH projects (e.g., Wang, 2010; Chen, 2013; Bol, 2017). A common theme was the ongoing debate around what DH is and what constitutes “good” DH (e.g., Hsiang, 2011; Tsui & Chen, 2017; Jiang, 2016). Over the past decade, DH has seen tremendous growth in LIA-related sectors that are closely aligned with digital scholarship and digitization efforts (e.g., Sun, 2021). In addition, DH has rapidly expanded across a range of disciplines, including history (Wang, 2015; Tsui, 2019; Deng, 2021), philology (Liu, 2022; Li & Wang, 2023; Liu & Li, 2021; Zhao, 2017), literature (Zhu, 2022; Wang, 2020), historical GIS (Chen, 2014; Pan, 2018), art history (Zhang & Zhu, 2024), and data visualization (Ouyang, 2016; Yan & Wang, 2018). This growth has been further accelerated by the launch of two dedicated DH journals in China, which have not only increased publication volume and thematic diversity but also attracted a younger generation of researchers.

Methodology

This is the first comparative study of its kind at this scale between digital humanities researchers in China and the UK. We adopted a qualitative comparative cross-national methodology grounded in existing literature and in semi-structured interviews with a range of scholars, practitioners and other stakeholders involved in digital knowledge production in the humanities and social sciences in both countries (23 in the UK and 22 in China). The project design was informed by critical infrastructure studies and sociotechnical approaches attending to both the material and symbolic dimensions of DH networks and infrastructures, by analysing different institutional, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts.

We identified interviewees on the basis of a combination of factors:

- An identifiable relationship to a well-known digital humanities centre or project.
- A significant proportion of our interviewees have had involvement in strategic discussions around the digital humanities in some way and/or have led on strategy and innovation in creative and cultural industries or the academic sector.
- We sought respondents across various institution types: digital humanities research centres, cultural heritage organisations, funders, policy organisations, publishers and software development companies working in the cultural space.
- This included in particular people who have been involved in recent professionalisation efforts in both countries, such as the UK-Irish Digital Humanities Network, the Chinese Alliance of Digital Humanities Institutions, and leading DH scholars in Hong Kong.

- While the fact that we included ‘national’ institutions in our study tends to give our cohort a bias towards capital cities, we made efforts to ensure that each cohort was as geographically (and thematically) representative as possible.

We interviewed each of the two sections of the cohort separately (China - Chen Jing; UK - Spence) over Microsoft Teams and Tencent Meeting. Our questions explored the effects of funding strategies, professional structures, professional associations, scholarly ecosystems, cultures of participation, credit and evaluation mechanisms, institutional support and teaching programmes. Further details on interview questions are provided in the appendix.

Once interviews were completed, the interview transcriptions were anonymised under the terms of our ethics application. We analysed the two cohorts separately, grouping responses under a series of headings which largely formed the basis for this report structure, exploring both similarities in response and ‘outlier’ responses. In our analysis, we contrasted different responses by institution and role type, exploring the kind of language people use when talking about their own experience of the digital humanities.

Summary of interview cohort

Respondents are split as follows:

Gender and age group

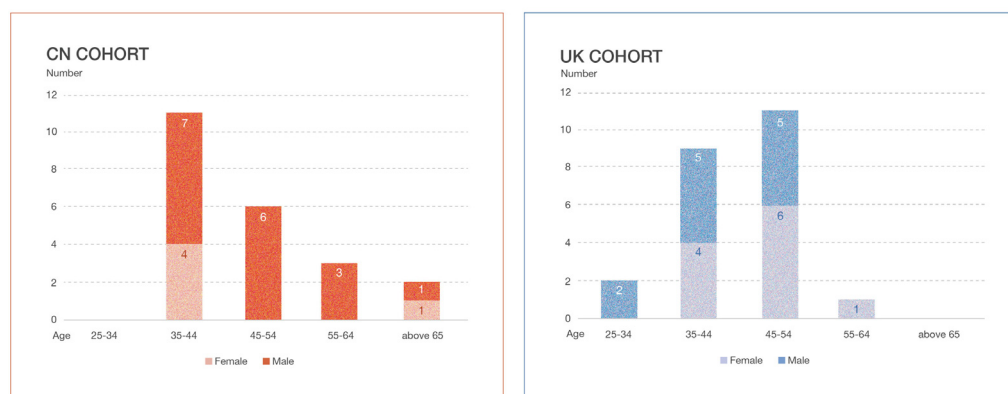


Figure 1 : Gender and age group

Respondents are evenly split by gender in the UK, with 11 women and 12 men, whereas in China there is a stronger bias towards male respondents (17 to 5). Most are in the 35-44 or 45-54 age groups in both cases.

Institution and job title

When asked about their main current job title, our UK interviewees skew towards people in senior positions, with 13 in director, head or other senior management roles. 39% of respondents (9 out of 23) are in academic posts, the remaining 61% in

non-academic posts. The study does include two people in early career/junior roles, but this important demographic, which is outside of the scope of this study, would benefit more focussed attention in future. Less than half (10 people, or 43%) are connected to a DH centre.

In the case of China, eight people are in director, head or other senior management roles. As in the UK case, less than half (ten people, or 44%) are connected to a DH centre. 17 people are in academic posts, including six associate professors, eight senior or chaired professors, two people in early career/junior roles and one associate editor. The remaining 23% in non-academic posts include one Principal Engineering Manager, one curator, two research librarians and one company CEO.

We can categorise the type of institutions based on respondent institutions (some belong to more than one group) as follows:

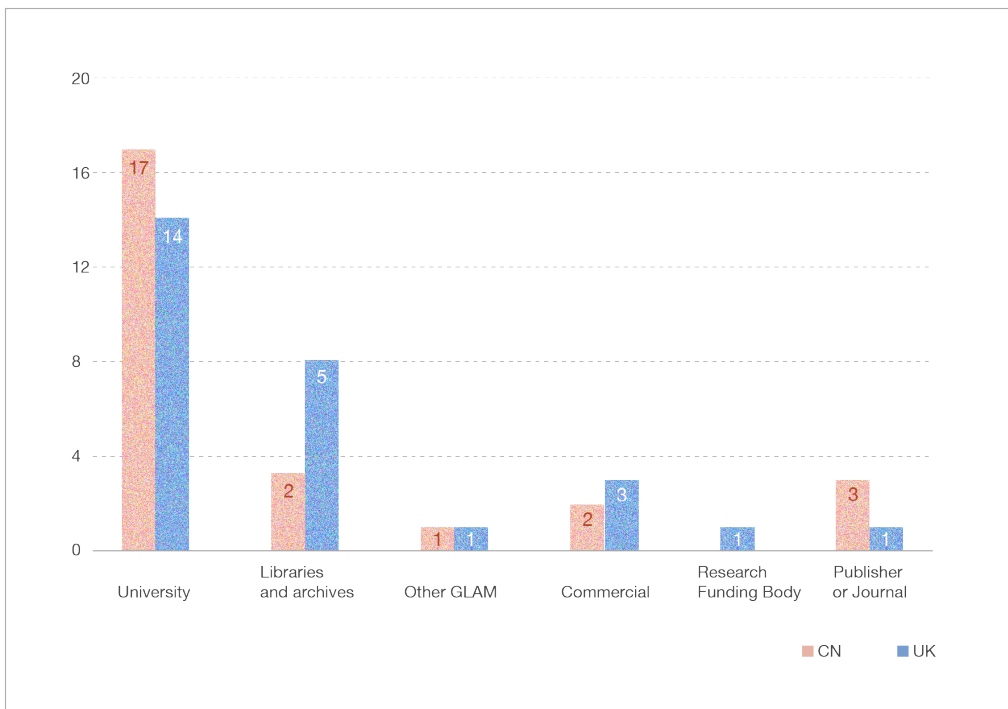


Figure 2 : Institution and job title

Other aspects

Languages

UK

The number of people who do not speak English natively is seven (or 30%), which is very high compared to other DH communities around the world and is reflective of the still highly international nature of DH researchers in the UK, even post-Brexit.

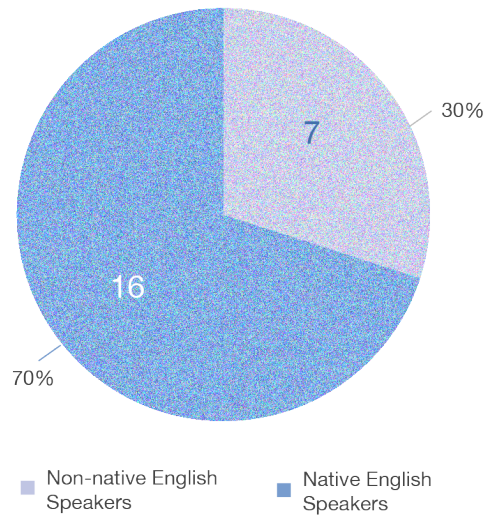


Figure 3 : UK Digital Humanities Scholars: Language Background

CN

All 22 respondents report a variety of Chinese (e.g., Mandarin, Cantonese) as their mother tongue, with one specifically identifying Cantonese as their native language. English is the most frequently used second language, reported by 77.3% of participants. A few also use Japanese (9.1%) or German (4.5%) in their work. 13.6% of respondents report not using any other language besides their mother tongue. This highlights the dominant role of English in academic and professional settings, with occasional use of other foreign languages or Chinese dialects.

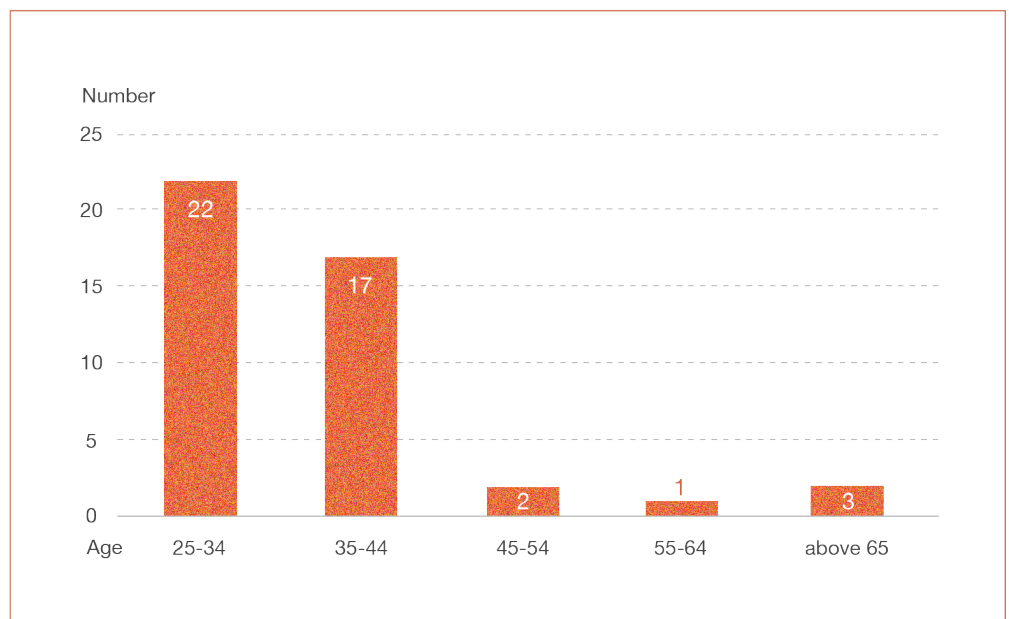


Figure 4 : China Digital Humanities Scholars: Language Use

DH connections

UK

Less than half (43%) are connected to a digital humanities centre. We did not necessarily select interviewees who self-identify with DH, but there is a strong correlation with UK-based people involved in the emerging UK-Irish association and other national or regional DH initiatives.

CN

Less than half (43%) are connected to a DH centre. These include affiliations with institutions such as Tsinghua University, Peking University, Nanjing University, Wuhan University, City University of Hong Kong, and China Renmin University. Others note informal involvement, such as creating DH-related platforms (e.g., 搜韵网) and one respondent mentions a planned but not yet established DH centre.

Entry to DH

UK

People often report having arrived in the digital humanities “via a circuitous route”, rather than through a conscious choice early in their careers, often through workshops, conference presentations or becoming aware of the field through DH mailing lists.

CN

Involvement in digital humanities among Chinese respondents varies widely, shaped by academic backgrounds, career paths, and institutional settings. Some entered the field through quantitative literary analysis or computational methods, while others were introduced via digitization initiatives, GIS applications, or archival work. International academic exposure and large-scale institutional projects have played a pivotal role in advancing DH development in China, often serving as gateways for scholars to engage with interdisciplinary methodologies. This diversity reflects the flexible and evolving nature of DH in the Chinese context, where both grassroots initiatives and top-down structures influence its trajectory.

Many interviewees made the transition to digital humanities from their original fields through involvement in digitization projects, the adoption of computational methods, interdisciplinary research, and changes in their institutional or professional roles.

Fields

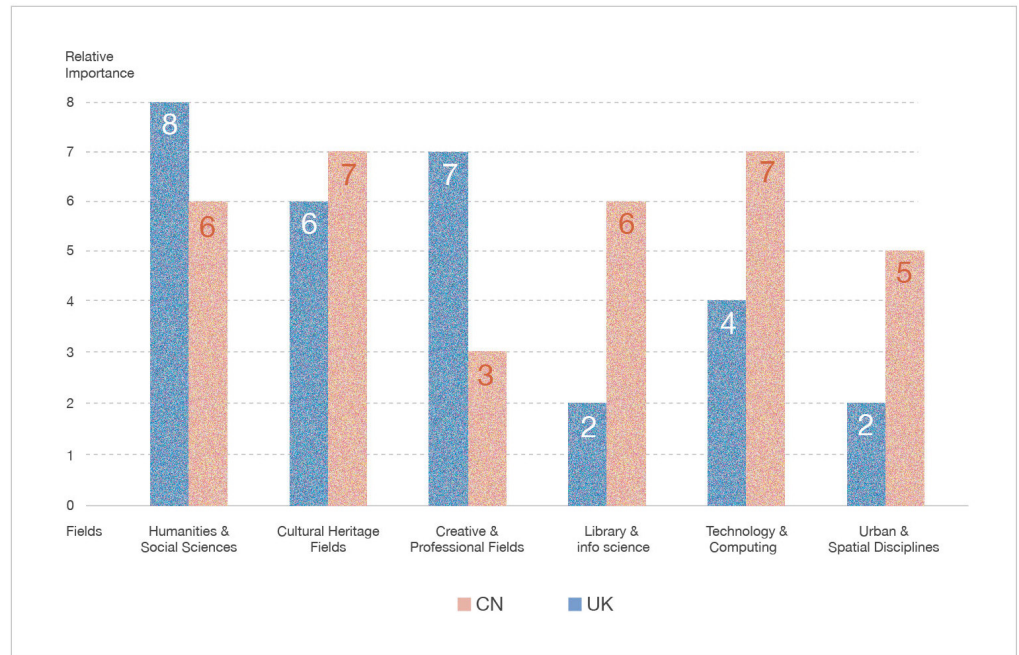
UK

Respondents work in a wide variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences (and beyond) as well as broader cultural, professional and technical fields (such as cultural heritage, museum studies, archival studies, graphic design, creative industries, product development and software engineering).

CN

The Chinese interviewees represent diverse disciplines in digital humanities, including Humanities & Social Sciences (e.g., Chinese Language, Literature, History, Geography, Urban Studies), Library & Information Science (e.g., Digital Publishing, Public Culture), Computer Science & Technology (e.g., Visual Data Analysis, Human-Computer Interaction, Technology Development), Museology & Cultural Heritage (e.g., Museum Digitization), and Urban & Landscape Planning. This interdisciplinary mix highlights how digital humanities methods are applied across various fields, blending traditional research with technological innovation to enhance scholarship and create new opportunities for collaboration and research in both academia and industry.

Figure 5 : Disciplinary Backgrounds bar chart



Digital methods

UK

Interviewees draw on a broad array of digital methods or techniques in their work, including digital imaging, web archive studies, data management, semantic representation and ontologies, data/information visualization, geospatial modelling, 3D modelling, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Natural Language Processing (NLP). There is a very real sense that the field spans a broad range of digital competence from basic digitization methods to advanced AI-based and computational methods. While the field undoubtedly still has a ‘text’ bias in the UK, there is evidence that DH is increasingly less text focused and more focused on multimedia and cultural heritage or other creative-cultural objects.

CN

Interviewees use a mix of programming languages (Python, C) and digital humanities tools for research. Some interviewees mention that they often prefer self-coded frameworks over pre-built software. Many of them think text processing remains challenging, with many relying on manual OCR corrections and annotation.

Researchers use metadata/ontological standards like CIDOC CRM but often customise tools to fit specific needs, such as ancient map digitization. One interviewee from GLAM believes that standardization efforts, especially in museums, lag behind libraries due to data complexity. While some benefit from new DH platforms like MARKUS, others find collaboration with domain experts crucial for data access.

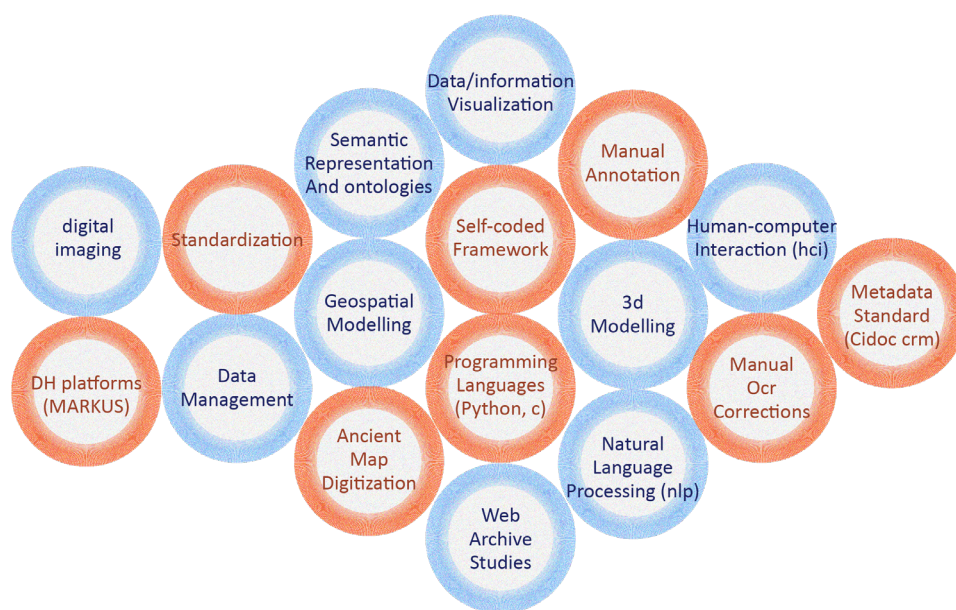


Figure 6 : Typical digital methods mentioned by interviewees

Training

In both countries, most interviewees have neither formal education in DH nor formal computational training, although some have training in computer science or information science. The skills people had are varied and tend to be connected to their job or research interests in both contexts.

Limitations and future steps

Our study aimed to be as representative as possible across different institution types, role types, regions within each country and career stage. We included some early career researchers, but there is a bias towards seniority due to the fact that one of our main areas of focus is on people with strategic involvement in digital humanities development. There is a bias towards people who self-identify with the digital humanities in some way (although by no means everyone does), partly as a result of our partial focus on people who have been active in digital humanities initiatives and networks in each country. While we aimed to mitigate the bias implied by our

own personal networks by proactively contacting people outside of these, inevitably there will be areas of DH we were not able to cover in such a broad-ranging field. We aimed for balanced regional coverage, although it was much harder to find respondents in some regions than others, which is partly a reflection of our own networks but also of the uneven state of the field, which we explore later.

While the boundary between digital humanities and broader digital scholarship is both ill-defined and highly porous, we feel that this report represents a significant critical assessment of the state of digital scholarship in, and between, the two countries at this moment in time, and of the specific roles which the digital humanities have to play in that. There is a danger in treating both DH communities as bounded ecosystems, but in our view, if done cautiously, this can be a helpful corrective to culturally unaware 'global' discourse or can allow us to account for regional differences.

Based on our research, we believe that more focused regional studies exploring digital humanities and digital scholarship in the humanities more generally would be valuable in highlighting global diversity in research practice.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the interviewees for engaging with our study, and for the insights they provide. We hope we have done their responses justice, and we alone are responsible for the contents of this report. We would also like to thank the following people who either reviewed sections or gave other forms of helpful advice: Tani Barlow, Arianna Ciula, Jieh Hsiang, Elisa Oreglia, Harold Short, Tao Wang, Jane Winters and two other anonymous reviewers.

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GENERAL FINDINGS

Current state of DH as a field

The opening stages in our interview study explored how interviewees view the current state of the digital humanities in their country (China or the UK). We started by asking them to give us three terms (single words or short phrases) which best described the digital humanities in their country at present, and from there we asked them to expand by describing the chief characteristics of DH there, key topics or tendencies in debates about DH, how DH contributed to their own professional/academic identity and how they viewed the current or future role of DH professional associations.

Three words

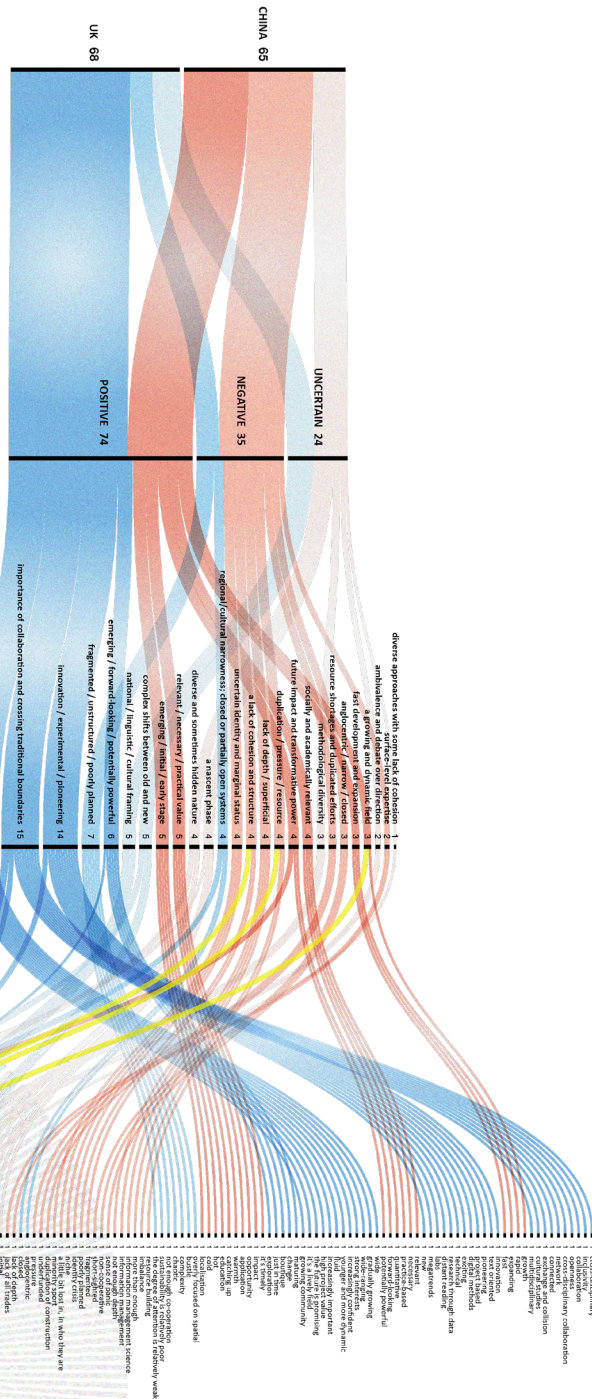


Figure 7 : Three words

Perception of DH characteristics in each country

The responses we received demonstrate that Chinese and UK digital humanities communities each exhibit a vibrant, rapidly evolving landscape, yet their developmental trajectories, institutional structures, and prevailing concerns reveal both commonalities and differences.

The terms and themes used to describe the Chinese digital humanities community demonstrated the following features:

- Frequent reference to “**Chinese characteristics**”, indicating a perceived uniqueness shaped by language, culture, and historical orientation.
- A dominant focus on **memory, history, and resource construction**, rather than contemporary events or social critique, which are more prevalent in Western DH.
- **Pragmatic and instrumental framing** of DH, where digital methods are often used as a strategic tool—for example, to improve chances of publication—rather than as deeply integrated research approaches.
- A strong sense of **rapid development**, with DH described as an “emerging” or “rising star” field with considerable growth potential.
- Simultaneously, the field is characterised as **fragmented, scattered, and loosely coordinated**, both across disciplines and between institutions.
- Ongoing concerns about **depth and originality**, with criticisms that the field can prioritise breadth and visibility over meaningful scholarly contribution.
- A noted **lack of extensive collaboration**, described as “non-cooperative” or “short-sighted”, often leading to duplication of effort and lack of shared infrastructure.
- A growing recognition of **epistemological disconnection**, where digital tools and humanistic inquiry are rarely integrated— which is described as a “two skins” phenomenon.
- A persistent sense of **humanistic anxiety**, with many scholars feeling unprepared to work digitally, contributing to uneven adoption and limited methodological innovation.
- Serious concern about the **global infrastructure divide**, with Chinese DH infrastructure perceived as significantly behind that of the West—particularly in areas like corpora, annotated texts, Large Language Models (LLMs), and deep learning applications.
- A cautiously optimistic sense of **cross-disciplinary warmth and openness**, even as practical collaboration and integration remain limited in practice.

In contrast, the terms used to describe the UK digital humanities community demonstrate the following patterns:

- Positive language around the **nature of the field** (“flourishing”, “lively” and “exciting”) but also doubts about its identity (“identity crisis”, “a little bit lost” or “misunderstood”).
- **Emerging confidence** in the digital humanities as a field.
- A sense of its **potential growth**, while still being “niche”, “poorly planned”, a “minority sport” or “boutique” for some at present, and with uncertain future direction.
- A focus on **project- and practice-based work** (although there is a lack of consensus around how widespread this is).
- A sense that the field often fosters **experimentation, accessibility, community and connection**.
- A dynamic of **inter- or transdisciplinarity** and **collaboration**.
- A growing slant towards **computational methods, data and infrastructure**.
- Strength in the **variety** of perspectives within the field, but at the same time a **need to attend to diversity**.

When asked to go deeper, interviewees note the following characteristics of UK digital humanities:

- Some note its pioneering role in early DH projects with international projection.
- The fact that it was one of the first DH national communities to initiate formal teaching programmes in digital humanities, in particular at postgraduate (Masters’) level.
- The first formal academic department in digital humanities in the world (at King’s College London, in the UK).
- On the other hand, nationwide investment has been and continues to be uneven, and for some the field still resembles “a loose coalition of practitioners and scholars rather than a discipline”.
- DH in the UK is deemed to have been historically less focused on literary studies than in, for example, the USA, and it is viewed as having a stronger foothold in academic research departments than is true in most countries (where DH is often housed elsewhere, for example in libraries). Similarly, there is a consensus that UK DH has maintained a strong tradition of connection to humanities disciplines.
- There is concern that there are still not clear pathways to becoming a digital humanist from undergraduate to postgraduate (MA) and then to doctoral studies.
- There is considerable excitement, and also concern, over the **computational turn** in DH.

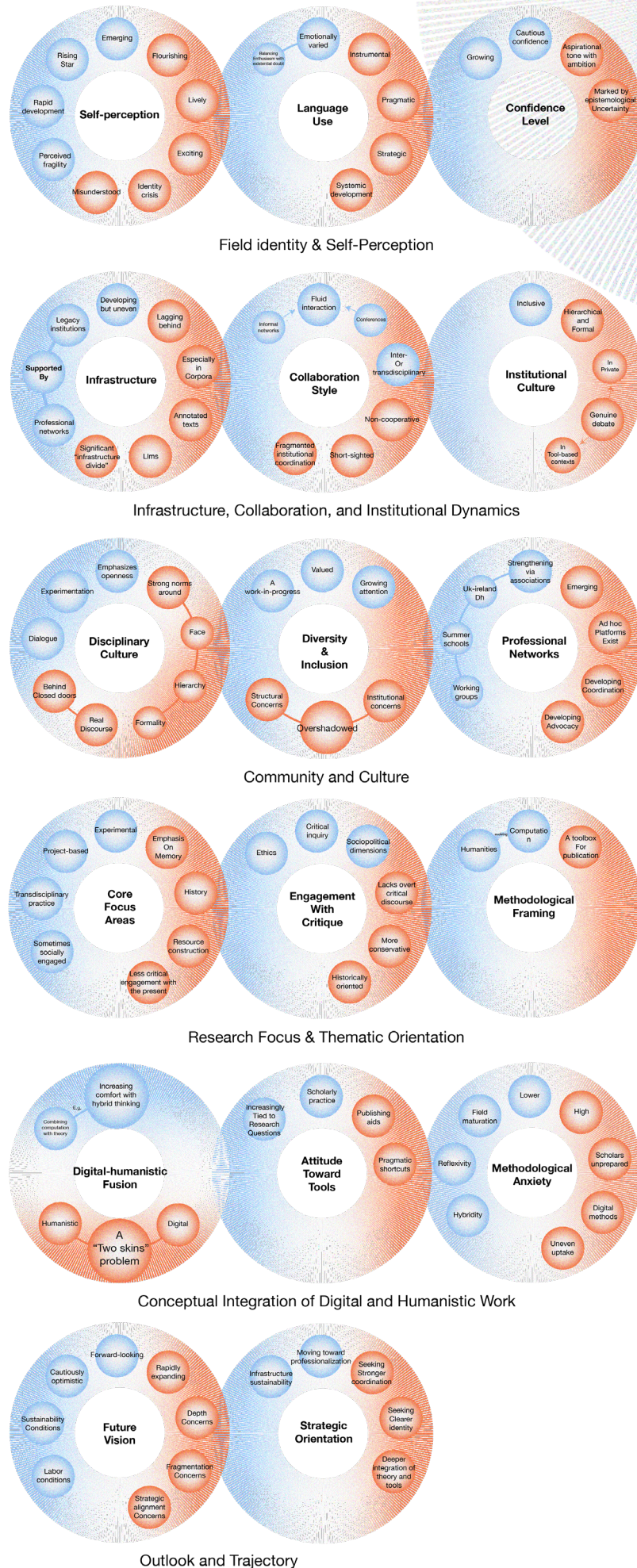


Figure 8 : Summary of comments about DH characteristics in their country

Formative events

Inevitably the responses here are shaped by the experiences of the study's interviewees and interviewees, but we feel that it is useful to provide a snapshot of formative events in DH in both countries, based on our study responses.

Both UK and China-based interviewees highlight the importance of professional associations, national/regional conferences, the establishment of academic programmes, and the role of digitization projects in shaping the field. However, the UK's development is rooted in a longer institutional history, with a range of funding options, capacity-building on digital projects (often connected to digitisation in the early days) and formal teaching programmes, while China's trajectory is more recent and marked by rapid institutionalization, international collaboration and the influence of new technologies and government policy.

In the UK, the origins of DH are traced by our interviewees to a "long history in the UK going back a long way", with foundational work in the early 1970s when the international Association for Literary Linguistic Computing (ALLC) was established (now called the European Association for Digital Humanities, EADH), accompanied later by the establishment of the historic journal *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, now called *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* and belonging to EADH. The introduction of formal taught programmes, such as the first MA in digital humanities at King's College London marked a turning point, helping to bring DH out of niche status and into mainstream academic recognition. Conferences such as the once regular Digital Resources in the Humanities (DRH) Conference, and the UK hosting of the international Digital Humanities conference in 2010, were pivotal in building community and visibility, while projects like the Proceedings of the Old Bailey project¹⁵ and the growth of key centres, such as the DH Institute in Sheffield and King's Digital Lab, "carved DH out as something that was not a service [...] but a discipline on its own, which had enormous scholarly value". Funding and digitization initiatives, including the AHRC Resource enhancement scheme, the New Opportunities Fund, and JISC support for large-scale digitization,¹⁶ were "really crucial in allowing funding specifically for digital research that allowed digitization as well". The establishment of national infrastructure, such as the Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) 1996-2008, distributed discipline-related AHDS centres: Oxford (Texts), York (Archaeology), Essex (History), Glasgow (Performing Arts), Surrey (Visual Arts) and the later inclusion of cultural heritage institutions as research partners, further anchored the field. More recently, the "setting up of the UK Ireland DH Association" and national-scale projects like *Towards a National Collection* represent ongoing milestones.

In China, DH is a newer field, officially introduced in 2009, with Mr. Wang Xiaoguang's article cited as a "landmark event". The influence of the CBDB project is repeatedly emphasised: "the preaching and spreading of CBDB [...] these scholars and their private networks have in a way constructed the underlying foundation for the spread of CBDB in China, and at the same time have been a real driving force, a potential force for its development". Institutionalization accelerated when on April 6th, 2023, China's Ministry of Education officially added 'Digital Humanities' to the national undergraduate program catalogue under Chinese Language and Literature

¹⁵See <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>

¹⁶See <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/>

¹⁷Weibo is a widely used Chinese microblogging platform

and was aided by the creation of digital humanities majors and research centres at universities such as Wuhan and Taiwan University. Conferences have played a major role: “Peking University organised three international conferences on digital humanities, which were very influential, and also set up the digital humanities Weibo¹⁷ group, which we’re all in now, which also had a big impact”. The “China Digital Humanities Annual Conference [...] serves as a great catalyst”, helping to unite and label the field: “it turned into a formal annual conference, and then a coalition was formed, so it put a label on the digital humanities Big tent and brought everyone together”. The emergence of academic journals, such as those at Tsinghua and Renmin University, and the translation and publication of digital humanities texts, are also cited as key events: and “the translation of digital humanities writings [...] had a still greater impact”. Technological developments, especially in artificial intelligence, are seen as transformative: “the emergence of the LLM [Large Language Model] has really changed Chinese academia and even the general public’s understanding of digital humanities”. The digitization of Chinese characters and archives, as well as large-scale projects like the National Library’s Smart Library System, are also seen as foundational.

Academic fields and fora

UK

I started teaching myself programming and that kind of stuff in my spare time.

CN

I started to make some attempts in this direction, and kept on making efforts, slowly reading more related research, and learning some related techniques, such as text analysis, spatial analysis, etc.

While there are many common threads between Chinese and UK scholars in terms of the core disciplines connected to DH, such as history, literature, and information science, there are also regional nuances in the integration of specific fields like data science, art history, linguistics, and social sciences, reflecting the unique academic priorities and technological engagements of each country.

Both UK and Chinese DH scholars emphasise history, literature and interdisciplinary social sciences, but UK scholars more commonly highlight textual studies and corpus linguistics, whereas Chinese scholars stress philosophy and social history. In the Chinese context, DH is most commonly connected to literature, with scholars noting, “ancient literature is doing better than modern literature” in DH work. Similarly, history is frequently cited, with Chinese scholars observing a “quantified and semi-invasive” relationship between history and economics, often facilitated by digital tools. UK scholars echo this, emphasizing history as a dominant domain in DH, stating that, “if you were to survey all the digital projects that have been done in the world, I think history would dominate that sector”. They further signal English literature as being closely tied to DH, although some are wary of limiting DH to just “text analysis”.

While both regions align on the importance of history and literature, there are differences in the emphasis on other disciplines. Chinese scholars place a strong

focus on information science, libraries, museums, and archives playing a major role in DH development, there, although information management and related fields are important in both contexts. The relationship to the GLAM sector is similarly important in both countries.

Additionally, Chinese scholars mention the intersections of DH with disciplines like linguistics and computational linguistics, with one participant emphasizing that computational linguistics “naturally applies” to DH research. On the other hand, the UK perspective highlights increasing influence from data science, noting that scholars are bringing “more computational approaches to large-scale data” into DH. Both regions recognise the growing role of technology in these fields, but with a slightly different focus.

Both the UK and China face challenges with digital platforms, albeit in different ways. Some UK scholars mourn the decline of Twitter, which once served as a key venue for DH discourse. While alternatives like Bluesky or Mastodon have emerged, they have not fully replaced Twitter’s former role, prompting a return to older communication formats like email and blogging. In China, domestic platforms like WeChat, rednote(小红书), and Bilibili dominate informal exchanges, offering quick engagement opportunities. However, despite the plethora of digital platforms available, scholars note that these venues tend to lack the depth of discussion seen in traditional academic settings. This has led to the observation that the theoretical rigor in Chinese DH discussions remains underpowered, and debates often lack the conceptual depth found in more established DH communities.

In the UK, DH discussions thrive within a well-established circuit of conferences and scholarly communities, where events such as the “Digital Humanities Congress in Sheffield, UK-Ireland DH Conference, Oxford, and Lancaster summer schools” form a vibrant backbone for exchange. Debate often flourishes at the margins of formality, during hallway chats, shared meals, or informal digital backchannels. This is reflective of the UK’s more informal, decentralised style of DH engagement, which values spontaneous, generative interactions. These informal exchanges are pivotal in the UK’s DH landscape, where scholars value human connection and candid dialogue.

On the other hand, Chinese DH scholars lament the lack of conceptual rigor and sometimes describe discussions as cyclical or blunt, with technical spaces like training workshops serving as unexpected catalysts for foundational questions. This highlights the tension between China’s desire for deeper theoretical engagement and the pragmatic, tool-focused discussions that dominate its current DH landscape. The field is expanding rapidly, but it navigates complex social dynamics that prioritise deference and harmony in public settings. Larger formal events often suffer from a traditional need to maintain face, leading to polite, superficial engagement, while more genuine dialogue emerges in small, closed-door sessions or tool-based training activities. This reflects a cautious optimism within China’s DH community, which is nevertheless sometimes constrained by cultural norms and institutional inertia. Scholars frequently voice a desire for more thematic focus and express frustration at the intentional and high-level nature of debates.

In terms of the issues dominating the discourse in both countries, AI has become a central trend in UK DH discussions, where there is both excitement and anxiety about AI’s implications. Scholars are particularly concerned with how AI tools like language

models are integrated into pedagogy, research, and ethics. These conversations often reflect the UK's more mature and decentralised DH infrastructure, where AI is linked to broader debates about digital preservation, the sustainability of large-scale data infrastructures, and ethical considerations. UK scholars are especially focused on how AI can be responsibly integrated into research practices while also acknowledging the challenges posed by the scale of data and the precarity of DH labour, in particular for Research Software Engineers¹⁸ and others working in more practical roles, such as those involving the construction of tools and resources.

¹⁸See discussion about this role later.

In China, while AI is also central to DH discussions, the focus is more on foundational issues like defining what DH is, whether programming is a necessary skill, and how DH can be meaningfully applied to traditional academic strengths such as textual studies, philology, and historical research. The integration of digital tools into these domains is a significant focus of Chinese DH scholarship, with AI seen as both a tool for enhancing research and an area of study in its own right. This pragmatic orientation also plays out in how Chinese scholars are eager for more structured and formalised theoretical debates, a stark contrast to the more fragmented and bottom-up nature of discussions taking place in the UK. We explore the 'computational turn' in more detail later.

Institutionally, the UK benefits from legacy structures in historic DH centres, alongside informal networks such as the Alan Turing Institute's Humanities and Data Science group Special Interest Group, which have provided vibrant forums for collaboration. However, concerns about exclusivity and the dangers of generating a "gentleman's club atmosphere" persist, raising questions about accessibility and inclusivity in DH circles. In China, DH networks are still taking shape, with emergent institutional platforms like the "Future Scholars Forum" and editorial boards of DH journals playing key roles in fostering scholarly exchange. Interestingly, businesses that repurpose DH for services blur boundaries and create new spaces for debate, though this trend also dilutes the academic focus, reflecting a hybrid commercialization that does not really feature in the UK Professional associations and journal/publications.

The responses in our study suggest that, in the UK, the field has felt the impact of not having a national professional association until recently. The UK-Ireland digital humanities association has filled an important gap, taking a highly inclusive approach to the UK and Irish DH communities, developing initiatives and community interest groups based on community needs and creating documentation around careers, training and communicating value. Responses to the interviews also signal its role in brokering connections across different sectors and in positioning DH in conversations around public debate about technology (e.g. AI), which has not occurred often enough in the past. There is a feeling among some people that the association could help people navigate the "proliferation of initiatives" and to channel activities in a more strategic manner as a "one stop shop" for information about digital humanities in the UK and Ireland, and that it could be particularly beneficial to early career colleagues or for those encountering the field for the first time. There are clear areas where its potential role in advocacy is valued – for example in relation to funders or policymakers at universities on topics such as mobility for different career profiles.

Turning to China, there are several emerging organizations and informal alliances that play a role in fostering digital humanities in the country. One interviewee notes

that “The China Digital Humanities Alliance [...] has a lot of flexibility, a certain degree of inclusiveness”. However, these organizations remain relatively loose and informal, without a strong central structure or unified approach. Scholars from prominent institutions such as Wuhan University and Peking University have been instrumental in advancing the field, but some feel that the broader potential of these institutions and initiatives has yet to be fully realised. One scholar mentions that the role of “the [Beijing] Palace Museum in cultural heritage digitization is very significant”. These informal structures, including conferences like the “China Digital Humanities Conference”, have helped to raise awareness, but many believe that a more powerful and cohesive organization is necessary to better coordinate efforts across the country. As one respondent states, “there is a lack of coordination and a real need for a more powerful organization”, and the roles these associations play are not fully defined.

In conclusion, in both the UK and China, scholars express a need for professional associations to foster greater collaboration, provide advocacy, and develop clear strategic directions for the future of digital humanities. The key challenges lie in resource limitations, the fragmentation of the field, and the struggle to balance institutional and academic interests, which we expand on below.

Academic identity and perceptions of DH

UK

I would say that it's central. I wouldn't have a job without it. And quite simply, I have no real interest in universities and academia without the DH element of it. I'm interested in how DH enables or facilitates new kinds of research across a whole range of disciplines and subjects.

CN

That's why this is half of my identity now whether I'm at an event or in a class or within the various circles of my own work. This is something I might not have expected when I entered the university or the academic world.

Our study found that the digital humanities provide scholars in both UK and China with novel intellectual spaces, professional opportunities, and interdisciplinary collaborations. But this also brings a double bind: the freedom to redefine academic identity comes with the challenge of occupying an ambiguous (and often undervalued) position in traditional academic structures.

UK scholars, over time, have enjoyed increasing recognition and the formation of DH-focused supportive communities, allowing many to publicly claim a DH identity. Chinese scholars, while equally passionate, often operate under more restrictive conditions, making DH a quieter undercurrent in their academic lives. In both cases, DH identity is not just about disciplinary labels – it is about institutional visibility, personal commitment, and the desire to carry out meaningful work across disciplinary boundaries. As DH continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which scholars articulate their place within it.

Among both UK and Chinese scholars, the digital humanities play a varied but often

deeply personal role in shaping academic identity. For many UK scholars, DH is not just a method or toolkit – it defines their academic being. One scholar remarks: “I would say that it’s central. I wouldn’t have a job without it... I’m interested in how DH enables or facilitates new kinds of research across a whole range of disciplines”. For this scholar, DH provides intellectual freedom, allowing movement across fields and resisting the rigidity of traditional academic specialization.

Another UK scholar describes **DH as an intellectual home**: “It is an important part of my academic identity”. Yet this same scholar also notes the conceptual ambiguity of the field: “I do think there are some problems with DH [...] it’s expanded to cover things that actually fall under digital scholarship rather than digital humanities”. These mixed feelings suggest that while DH may ground their identity, it also brings with it certain tensions about its scope and meaning.

In contrast, **Chinese DH scholars are more cautious in positioning themselves squarely within DH**. Many see themselves as historians, librarians, or computer scientists using DH tools, rather than identifying as DH scholars per se. As one Chinese scholar reflects, their DH work is often voluntary or side-lined due to the lack of institutional frameworks: “My identity is ambiguous and lacks institutional backing”. This often results in a dual identity—where DH is personally fulfilling, but not professionally recognised.

Institutional support – or the lack of it – emerges as a crucial factor influencing how scholars identify with DH. In the UK part of the study, we observe a relatively sharp divide between those working in institutions with established digital humanities centres, and those working elsewhere. Meanwhile, the inclusion of DH in job descriptions has helped legitimise DH as an academic identity, although traditional distinctions between ‘academic’ and ‘non-academic’ roles, with the hierarchization they bring, complicate matters.¹⁹

¹⁹In this report, we wish to emphasise that academic contributions come from people working in a diverse range of roles and contracts, including those working on non-academic contracts.

In China, however, the story is different. A recurring issue is the absence of formal DH programmes or titles. One scholar notes: “much of the DH work is done voluntarily [...] there’s no structured funding or formalised position”. This lack of formalization leads to a marginal status for DH practitioners, who often have to sustain their DH research alongside other institutional obligations or policy-driven roles. As a result, DH identity in China often remains implicit, secondary, or masked under other disciplinary labels.

DH’s inherently interdisciplinary nature creates both opportunities and identity tensions for scholars in both contexts. One UK scholar highlights the fluidity this interdisciplinarity brings: “The idea of becoming a specialist in one particularly narrow field... has never really appealed to me”. DH offers a platform to engage across disciplines, which for many is intellectually liberating and aligns with their broader academic curiosity.

However, this fluidity can sometimes lead to uncertainty, especially within traditionally structured institutions. For numerous scholars, engaging in digital humanities has deepened their understanding of how different disciplines operate, shaping distinct ways of thinking and working. For many, DH offers a flexible and exciting identity, and yet also a contested or marginal one, particularly when their home departments or national academic systems do not fully embrace interdisciplinarity.

In China, personal interest also drives many scholars to pursue DH projects despite limited institutional support. Yet this often leads to identity bifurcation: scholars may publish DH work while identifying primarily with another discipline, such as history or library science. This dual role can be both enriching and burdensome, as they must navigate institutional structures that do not always reward DH engagement.

Some scholars anticipate a future where DH might dissolve into broader disciplinary practices. As one put it: “I think it’ll become more integrated into different disciplines rather than being an outlier”. This prediction also speaks to a hopeful trajectory – where DH will not need to justify itself as a separate identity but will be accepted as part of mainstream academic life – although we might question whether DH and the wider humanities will actually merge, or in fact continue to have complementary roles, as at present.

The ambiguity of the label “digital humanities” itself is a recurring theme in scholars’ reflections on identity. One UK scholar openly states: “I know there’s a lot of debate about whether it should be called digital humanities [...] I think it is important to have something that people identify as understandable and relatable”. This pragmatism points to the strategic use of the DH label – for career visibility, for community-building—even when its conceptual boundaries remain contested.

In China, the integration of DH into institutional structures is still evolving. While it may not yet feature prominently in top-level strategic documents—one scholar notes that “a librarian or PVC [Pro Vice-Chancellor] for research wouldn’t mention DH; it comes as second or third-tier priority”—there is growing recognition of its value among individual researchers. As awareness and support continue to build, DH has the potential to move from the margins towards a more visible and legitimised role within the academic landscape.

Funding

CN

Funding is not easy to come by. But it's not easy for young people to get projects. In recent years, there has been a clear trend that digital humanities are becoming more prominent in the National Social Science Fund. Digitalization has become a trend in major projects.

Funding environment

The general funding environment is challenging for the arts and humanities as a whole right now internationally. Our study of funding contexts in both China and the UK found that DH work is often carried out without long-term funding or sustainability plans. Scholars in the UK rely on competitive grants, typically from agencies like the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), or from private or charitable organisations, with application success hinging on innovation, interdisciplinarity, and public engagement. UK digital humanities researchers often have access to a wider variety of funding sources than is the case for China, and

continue to benefit from significant European funding, despite the temporary break caused by Brexit. There is increasingly an emphasis on thematic and large-scale collaborative modes of funding.

In China, more centralised and strategic funding is available—especially for projects aligned with national goals such as digital cultural heritage, smart cities, or the integration of AI and humanities. While this can enable large-scale infrastructure and broad institutional participation, it can also constrain project scope and limit academic autonomy. Thus, while UK DH undergoes flux due to its thematic or project-based model, Chinese DH operates within a more top-down structure that prioritises strategic alignment over bottom-up innovation.

How easy is it to get funding?

How easy is it to get funding for digital humanities research? Both UK and Chinese interviewees agree that **humanities projects with a digital focus** (and in particular using computational methods) are **more likely to attract funding**, in part because the digital humanities provide a bridge between the humanities and ‘digital transformation’ or ‘innovation’ agendas. However, there is a perceived danger that this can lead to some utilizing the DH label to obtain funding without meaningfully engaging with digital methods.

In the UK, funding is no longer limited to ‘applied’ digital humanities research (typically in collaboration with other humanities partners); it **increasingly supports DH-centred or DH-led research** to build new tools, methods and infrastructure, or technologically advanced joint collaborations with cultural heritage partners. On another positive note, in the UK it is far **easier for DH researchers to take on Principal Investigator (PI) or Co-Investigator (CI) roles** than it used to be.

In China, there is a stronger reliance on government programmes such as the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC, 国家社会科学基金), the Ministry of Education (教育部) and corporate partnerships. DH funding remains allocated within universities rather than through national DH-specific programmes. A small number of high-profile universities dominate access to funding, and commercialization brings new opportunities but also ethical concerns and reputational risks for academia. Some Chinese interviewees feel that the digital humanities are often caught between institutional constraints, short term funding models and unrealistic expectations, and “large-scale digitization projects receive more funding, but DH-specific grants remain scarce”.

How does funding shape DH research?

In the UK, there is increasing pressure to fund projects with ‘**real world**’/ ‘**global**’ **impact** or ‘**demonstrable value**’, while in China there is an emphasis on the ‘**new liberal arts**’ (新文科), ‘**commercially viable**’ projects and **technology-drive productivity**. There is concern that the current focus on scale sometimes leads to an emphasis on short-term results, and form over substance. There are **buzzwords** at

any given time which seem to have **outsized influence on funding decisions** – a few years ago ‘Big Data’; now ‘AI’. Researchers in the UK also sometimes feel pressure to over-promise deliverables in grant proposals, which can lead to stress and unrealistic expectations.

Whereas **large-scale digitisation** in the UK has declined, in China, digitisation (in particular of cultural heritage) remains a major priority. UK funding often supports **projects amplifying marginalised voices** and addressing social justice, whereas in China funding focuses more on **broad societal or governmental research priorities** and cultural heritage. There is an **increased focus on digital infrastructure and skills training** in both countries.

In the UK, funding increasingly supports **digital research infrastructure**²⁰, a strategy which aligns with broader European research infrastructure investment which has engendered projects such as DARIAH and CLARIN.²¹ Funding in the UK has increasingly involved integrating DH within wider conversations about cultural heritage and creative industry, such as the Towards a National Collection programme, which are designed to facilitate greater public and research engagement with cultural and social data.

Although the funding for DH projects in China is increasing, in recent years there has been a risk of duplication in some large-scale projects, which some view as wasteful. Digital humanities scholars face a “double disadvantage”: they are less skilled in computing than tech specialists and less established in the humanities than traditional scholars. As a result, they cannot compete with the technical expertise of industry professionals, and some may exploit the label to create a superficial intermediary identity, rather than contributing to the development of a long-term academic discipline.

Whereas in the UK, teaching funding increasingly replaces historic DH dependence on fixed term project funding, which provides greater stability for digital humanities centres, many Chinese DH research centres lack stable financial backing, leading to challenges in maintaining continuous and coherent research programmes. This has led to universities increasingly seeking corporate funding for DH projects through collaborations with tech companies such as ByteDance²². Some researchers secure funding by offering consulting services to libraries and cultural institutions. Chinese scholars describe a more rigid funding landscape, where digital achievements are rarely foregrounded in grant evaluations, and where research support for DH is still developing. The core challenge in China is to move from a project-based, short-term model to a long-term, structurally integrated funding model that values DH as a foundational methodology rather than an auxiliary tool.

²⁰See the Digital Research Infrastructure Programme <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/creating-world-class-research-and-innovation-infrastructure/digital-research-infrastructure/>

²¹See <https://www.dariah.eu/>, <https://www.clarin.eu/> and <https://www.esfri.eu/>

²²The Chinese internet company behind TikTok and its Chinese counterpart Douyin.

Changes people would like to see in funding

Various suggestions are made regarding desirable future changes in the funding models for DH research, with significant consensus between the two countries in many areas. In both countries, there is a **strong desire for funding frameworks that better accommodate the longer timelines, collaborative structures, and technical requirements** typical of DH research.

Interdisciplinary boundaries are identified as one key challenge. There is a perception that DH research is often assessed by people without the relevant expertise for interdisciplinary evaluation, with common misunderstandings around the DH contribution from both humanities and technical evaluators (one interviewee notes a case where historians did not recognise ‘DH’ research as valid historical research from a methodological perspective, whereas computer scientists dismissed the methods used as ‘mere applications’). There is a **lack of qualified reviewers** for DH work, and the lack of formal recognition for the digital humanities as a field by funders and research evaluation agencies – such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK – is viewed by some as a limitation.

There are various suggestions regarding **how to re-structure funding**. UK interviewees criticise the dominance of the three-year model, proposing that other formats be used more frequently, such as two-stage funding processes, for example, involving a one-year preparatory phase for proof-of-concept work, before the ‘main’ research begins. Chinese scholars highlight the rigid nature of humanities and social sciences funding compared to the flexibility of science-based funding for emerging fields. UK respondents call for more transparent peer review feedback; they also propose integrating a more robust ethics evaluation process into funding applications.

Others suggest that the establishment of a specific UK entity channelling digital humanities funding such as the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Digital Humanities in the US, and “attuned to the demand and lifecycles of DH projects” would help overcome the idea that DH has to be part of the “narrative of other kinds of humanities research”.

Early career researchers and **smaller DH initiatives** in both countries face significant challenges in accessing funding for DH research, which has become even more acute due to the move towards funding for large-scale projects and the current dominance of AI. Chinese interviewees argue for a top-down approach driven by leadership priorities, whereas some UK respondents advocate for smaller pots of funding (in the order of £5,000 GBP) to be made available for early career scholars and others to perform exploratory research.

The **funding models for open access and collaborative publication** are seen as being underdeveloped. Nevertheless, there is significant pressure towards open access publications in the UK from ‘above’ and ‘below’, and the next frontier in ‘open research’ is likely to be around ‘open datasets’ and workflows, a trend which is also consistent with the European Open Science agenda.

There are ongoing concerns that **sustainability remains a critical issue** for digital infrastructure, digital tools and digital outputs. In both countries there are voices advocating for investment in long-term development in the digital humanities rather than funding which reacts to ephemeral trends and which only brings short-term gains.

DH is regarded as having an advantage in being more easily able to engage with collaborators beyond academia, such as partners in industry. From a UK funder perspective, it is felt that digital humanities are more active in some humanities areas than others. For example, they identify the funding towards creative industries – in particular the intersection between academic research, and mixed, augmented

or virtual reality (MR/AR/VR) practice – as an area where DH researchers could be more active. They feel that DH has the potential to play an important role in articulating how the arts, humanities and cultural data “powers many sectors” including publishing, screen-based media, performance and theatre.

In the UK, DH-related funding has increasingly moved away from funding one-off research projects with specific research questions to larger scale ‘strategic’ or ‘cluster-like’ approaches, building networks of digital skills. But there is concern from some in the GLAM sector that the fast-paced research agenda and the “constant requirement for innovation” in DH research projects does not always allow ideas and methods to “bed in”, and that more strategic oversight is needed in the connection between big infrastructure projects, for example.

Infrastructure

UK
 I think that's really challenging, I think. It's an area that I'm really interested in. I think building infrastructure that allows sharing of collections across institutions is something that TNC (Towards a National Collection) have had a go at and it's a difficult space because it's technically changing quite quickly and the shift into the AI-powered version of doing things is going to have an impact.

CN
 Until now, digital humanities infrastructure has been a work in progress. It doesn't seem to have been really built up, it's still a few projects, especially the big ones. In essence, we will find that the surface is very active, but there may still be some fundamental obstacles, this kind of obstacle is deeply rooted in institutionalization.

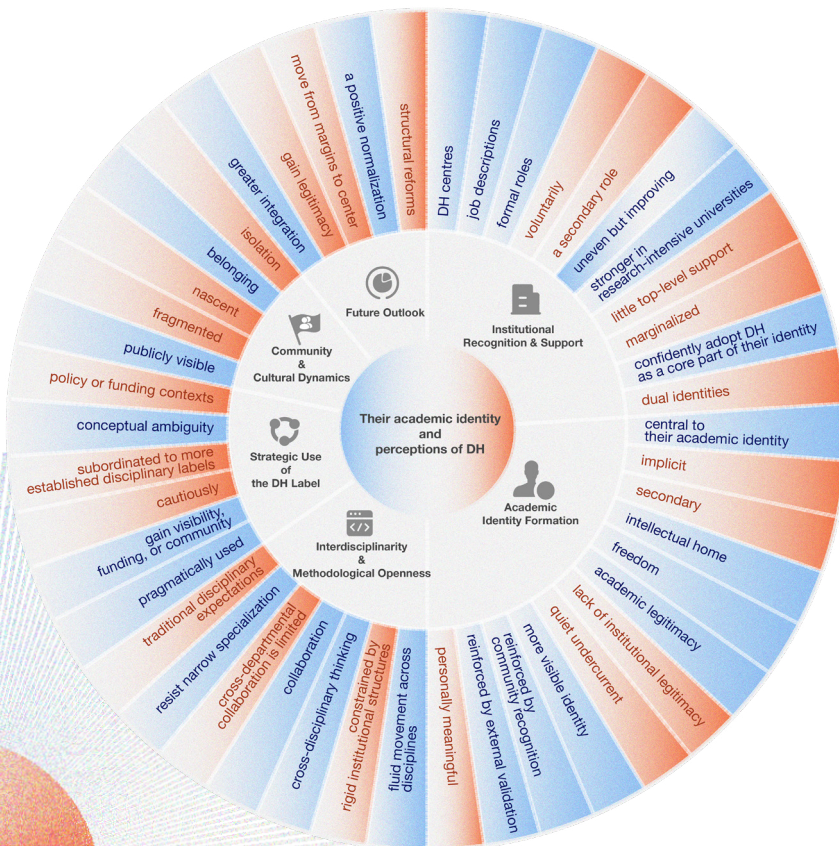


Figure 9: Their academic identity and perceptions of DH

Digitally mediated Research Infrastructure (RI) is generally understood as consisting of the digital platforms, tools/methods, standards, services, human resources and networks required to support academic research. Digital research infrastructure in the humanities has often suffered from funding limitations in comparison with the STEM disciplines, not helped by a degree of historic indifference from many humanities scholars which has compounded their lack of agency over the design of the infrastructures they use. In the last decade this has started to change, in part due to influential publications such as the European Science Foundation (ESF) report on Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities in 2011 and strategic initiatives such as the pan-European research infrastructures DARIAH and CLARIN. Additionally, in recent years research attention has increasingly been drawn to the social and cultural dimensions of infrastructures, and perspectives based on a Critical Infrastructures Studies paradigm have sought to better understand how the infrastructures we use or create, serve to shape (and limit), the kind of knowledge we are able to create.²³

²³See <https://cistudies.org/about/>

Perception around infrastructure

Our study asked interviewees to assess the state of digital humanities infrastructure in their country, and what changes they would like to see in future. Despite differing national contexts, UK and Chinese DH scholars share common concerns about **fragmented infrastructure, short-term funding models, technological barriers** and **uneven resource distribution**. Both groups emphasise the need for sustained investment, better integration of digital tools into humanities research and more standardised platforms to facilitate collaboration and improve accessibility.

There are a few differences too. UK respondents focus more on widening access to and education about research infrastructure; on legal, ethical and environmental challenges; and on providing open access to, and interoperability between, content currently sitting across different institutions. Chinese scholars, on the other hand, tend to more often stress training gaps, and they **similarly highlight uneven development** but frame it within the context of **regional disparities**. Top-tier universities in urban centres often have better access to resources, while smaller institutions and rural areas are underfunded. Although large-scale digitization efforts are underway, many archives remain inaccessible due to copyright issues and inconsistent policies.

Models for infrastructure

What models exist for DH research infrastructure in both countries? Our UK interviewees highlight numerous key stages in the development of RIs, from the early establishment of resource creation projects (with the accompanying expertise in methods and tools which these brought), to strategic capacity-building projects such as the AHRC ICT Methods Network and national data repository services such as the Oxford Text Archive (OTA), now hosted by the Literary and Linguistic Data Service.²⁴

²⁴See <https://lids.ling-phil.ox.ac.uk/>

The establishment of the UK Arts and Humanities Data Service in 1996 is seen by many in our study as a key milestone, and its dissolution in 2008 led to atomised support for research infrastructure and data management for a number of years. Moving to a funder perspective, there has been an increased commitment by UKRI in recent years to investment in research infrastructure, which has included an arts and humanities/cultural heritage sector focus evident through programmes such as Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science (RICHeS), Convergent screen technologies and performance in realtime (CoSTAR) and Infrastructure for Digital Innovation and Curation in Arts and Humanities (iDAH).

There is **widespread consensus across different UK stakeholders in favour of a more cohesive national approach to (digital) humanities research infrastructure which might connect isolated research ‘silos’, and foster collaboration and broaden access beyond a relatively small group of well-resourced and well-trained centres and institutions.** It is felt that there is a need to consider “**digital work across the research lifecycle**” and to “embed” digital methods and workflows more deeply into humanities research practice, with an emphasis on research data management to support the development, reuse and long-term sustainability of datasets.

There is some agreement on the need to promote a digital humanities research landscape which lowers the barrier for entry, without a strong consensus on how to achieve that. Some call for a common toolbox for digital methods and tools which any arts and humanities researcher could easily access without the need for major funding or institutional support. One DH researcher describes how, instead of running tools from their computer (where **installation and security issues are pervasive**), they would like to access cloud-based research resources maintained at a national or regional level, with a wide range of tools available on demand. A person in a senior position for funding strategy proposes a “grander, more academic-led” version of the digital scholarship labs produced by companies such as Gale and ProQuest, which provide access to content (that can then be filtered and customised for a particular research project), along with text mining and visualization tools (together with programmatic access for those used to working with online interactive coding environments such as Jupyter notebooks). In this scenario, researchers would not just be faced with “passive repositories” or collections but would have **access to in-built tools within an infrastructure which allow them to carry out complex analysis on a broad range of humanities materials without the need for complex local installations** on their own devices, or elusive technical support.

UK interviewees also note the strong history of involvement in European regional infrastructures such as DARIAH and CLARIN, which have significantly influenced the UK landscape by allowing UK researchers to contribute to cross-European advances in DH research and education.

Chinese respondents likewise observe that the concept of digital humanities infrastructure has been very important in the development of the field, noting the influence of some high-profile digital humanities platforms, such as the CBDB at Harvard, MARKUS at Leiden University, Shanghai Library Database, Global Image Catalogue of Ancient Chinese Book Collections, Jihe 籍合网, Souyun 搜韵, and Shidianguji 识典古籍 in laying the foundation for research infrastructure in the country. Several indicate that there has historically been a degree of duplication in infrastructure creation, in part triggered by institutional competition, and that

greater collaboration would help to maximise limited resources. Coupled with this, there is consensus that a lack of open datasets and APIs hamper cooperation and that stronger frameworks for sharing are needed in order to realise the full value of otherwise extensive digital humanities research and innovation. At least one contributor feels that this would help to improve the visibility of Chinese digital humanities research.

There is a **strong interest in developing better technical infrastructure, but interviewees also highlight the need for data “validation” and “digital criticism” around how data is created and used. In the words of one interviewee, “the work of infrastructure is to provide academic norms of mutual trust and mutual recognition”**. In some cases, people feel that Chinese digital humanities infrastructure needs better discovery mechanisms – sometimes there are good resources out there, but there is insufficient information to help users locate them.

Study participants also note the special challenges people face in working with the Chinese language, especially around historical characters. These challenges include difficulties in acquiring original datasets, leading to the need for manual OCR correction and annotation. Participants feel that more work is needed to deal with characters which are no longer used, and there are issues around standardisation in treatment of characters across different tools and platforms. Specifically, they report that museum data faces significant challenges in standardization due to scattered and heterogeneous formats, whereas libraries have developed a more mature approach to standardization.

Finally, there are concerns around domestic versus global infrastructure. But there is also solid appreciation of the importance of infrastructure in “recording, restoring, transmitting, disseminating, deriving and transforming historical and cultural resources and humanistic knowledge”. This research infrastructure is capable of connecting different (digital) humanities research projects – and collaborating with the GLAM sector – which hold historical and cultural content at scale in order to produce “very rich digital products and applications” which go far beyond the sum of their parts.

Conclusions

A shared emphasis among both groups is the role of DH in constructing new research infrastructure as a foundation for generating new knowledge. Chinese scholars particularly underscore the **importance of constructing national-level digital platforms**—such as large-scale archives, historical GIS (Geographic Information Systems), and multimodal databases—that facilitate **long-term collaborative research and cultural preservation**. These infrastructures are seen **not only as technical resources but also as epistemic environments** that define what kinds of knowledge can be produced. Scholars also recommend improved funding models that balance short-term needs with long-term sustainability and call for standardised data practices to address database incompatibility.

UK scholars also value infrastructure, particularly involving open-access repositories and cross-collection perspectives, and often frame these efforts within **debates**

about transparency, data ethics, and academic labour. They tend to focus on **modular, federated and project-based** platforms that support resource sharing, critical reuse and interpretive flexibility. While infrastructure is a key site of innovation for both, UK scholars more commonly critique its sociotechnical underpinnings, whereas Chinese scholars tend to focus more exclusively on its role in national cultural development and institutional capacity building.

Professionalisation and institutional structures

UK

I think it's quite hard within an institution. At least I think there are more opportunities to be promoted by moving to a different institution than there are in a lot of disciplines because there's still hiring, going on in DH. So you do see that happening, but within institutions, I think it's quite hard, particularly if they haven't adapted their promotion criteria away from the "you must have a 'monograph and four articles'" type output.

Structuring DH

Digital Humanities development in both the UK and China faces structural challenges, though the institutional environments differ.

In the UK, there are a number of different institutional models for digital humanities: as an **independent academic department**, as an **interdisciplinary centre**, as a **'lab'**, as an **area within other humanities departments** or as **part of other units** (for example within a university library). The respondents identify UK's "long history of DH centres and departments" as a factor which has given the field greater visibility in the UK – because it has cemented the notion that digital humanities is doing serious and meaningful academic research – and which has helped it to achieve stronger institutional support. While some digital humanities units enjoy relative stability, other interviewees feel that their liminal position within university structures led to their role not being fully understood, and this can lead to them being vulnerable to institutional changes.

The impression given by our study is of a **structural divide between a minority of institutions with relatively well-resourced departments or centres who have been able to achieve "a certain critical mass", and who can therefore sustain DH profiles and activity, and a majority of universities or other institutions where work in DH is more tenuous.** This suggests that more attention needs to be given to how DH research is supported in more precarious conditions, at both institutional and individual levels.

People can feel disoriented even in better provisioned contexts. Someone based in a national centre of strength in DH reports that while their centre's mission speaks about how it is "designed to encourage interdisciplinarity and people working in partnership", in reality "departmental and institutional disciplinary silos get in the way of that all the time" as a result of processes which do not cater for

cross-institutional planning and forms which do not allow them to record cross-institutional collaborations. Chinese scholars similarly emphasise the importance of “the academic community built by small-scale social networks, which may be informal”.

Interviewees in both countries recognise that current academic structures, often entrenched in disciplinary silos, are not always the most effective in fostering genuine cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Most UK interviewees feel that their institutions **are generally supportive of the digital humanities, even if they do not always understand it well**: “they kind of know that they want something digital, but they don’t really understand what that is”. There are debates about what the most effective structure might be, with respondents highlighting the advantages of different models (the stability of a department versus the agility of a centre or lab, for example). The impression given is that the digital humanities in the UK operates in a number of very different institutional contexts at the moment, and while a more homogenous set of institutional models might be effective, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy would likely be counter-productive.

Chinese scholars, meanwhile, describe a landscape where digital humanities centres and labs are proliferating, but often “just [as] a name”, with uncertain effectiveness: “after the establishment of some digital humanities centres, I am not particularly sure whether they are actually running and playing a role [...] to a large extent”. There is a strong emphasis on the need for “labs” and “infrastructure”, with the ideal being “a lab where all the resources can be accessed directly”, supporting both hardware and data needs. Yet, the reality is that most organizations are “still dominated by research organisations” and “virtual institutions”, and some wish that organizations were “more visionary and ambitious”. The **Chinese context also faces challenges in building a national-level association for digital humanities**, with one scholar noting, “there is no national first-level society to promote the development of digital humanities. It is also difficult to do this in China, because now the establishment of the first-level society itself is very difficult”.²⁵

²⁵In China, there is a hierarchy of associations and establishing associate status needs permission from the government. All DH associations in China belong to something called a first-level society (一级学会). and it is very difficult to get approval from the Chinese government for new first-level societies now.

Jobs and roles

In China, the lack of defined career trajectories presents a major hurdle to the professionalization of Digital Humanities. In the UK, the situation is more nuanced, and scholars following the formal ‘academic’ pathway find themselves at a significant advantage over those on ‘non-academic’ contracts. A number of interviewees in both countries gave the opinion that entry into the field often happens by chance rather than by design. Some UK scholars argue that practitioners “fall into” DH through exposure to digital tools, while Chinese academics describe DH as still being in an “experimental stage”, offering limited guidance for new graduates. There has been an increase in job titles (and roles with digital humanities in the title) in the UK in recent years, for both HEI (Higher Education Institution) and non-HEI (e.g. library) positions, which has helped strengthen DH identity, although there is also concern that the definition of DH in people’s job responsibilities is sometimes opaque.

In the UK, digital humanities roles are most commonly found within academic departments rather than in libraries, which contrasts with the US model:

“The UK is different from the US in that I think still most DH roles are based in academic departments. So ‘lecturer in something with DH’ is probably the most common presentation”. Some suggest that departmental anchoring means that digital humanities is seen as a research-focused activity, not merely a support service: “there’s less of an expectation that universities will have a kind of service department whose only job it is to provide IT-type support to digital projects”. However, some feel that the field suffers from a lack of clear career pathways and stable labels, with many scholars “uncertain about whether or not I am a digital humanist”, and observing, “I don’t feel like there is a clear structure there”. **Career progression is often fluid and can be challenging, especially for those in technical or professional services roles:** “the way university contracts and the kind of pay band/pay spine system really make it challenging for career progression for non-academic staff, which in turn makes it really hard to retain talented technical staff”. Promotion within institutions is frequently complicated by traditional evaluation criteria that do not always recognise digital outputs: “it’s not understood that a database and multiple datasets and a tool, is equivalent, if not more work than writing a book”. Despite these challenges, there is optimism as more DH teams and centres are established, and as the field benefits from its “newness”, which allows for experimentation and the development of new professional identities.

Chinese digital humanities roles are still emerging and are often tied to existing positions in libraries, museums, or traditional humanities faculties. There is a strong sense of uncertainty about what constitutes a digital humanities job: “As an undergraduate major in digital humanities, what exactly should be learnt?” and “assessment and promotion lack clarity; a new mechanism is needed for the digital humanities programme”. Most digital humanities graduates find positions in libraries, archives, or as academic staff in universities, where they may work on digitization, digital preservation, or digital resource management. The job market for digital humanities in China is described as experimental and uncertain, with few dedicated roles in industry: “it’s probably still mostly in libraries at the moment that can offer a stable combination of positions with digital humanities, and it’s hard to find others”. There is hope that as the field grows, more specialised and recognised positions will emerge, both in academia and in digital culture industries.

As noted already, it is more challenging for people not on traditional academic pathways to work in DH in the UK, **but the establishment of a framework outlining the role of the Research Software Engineer (RSE) (and a set of related roles) within a digital humanities context²⁶ has been a major contribution of the UK DH community.** This framework has enabled progress to be made in giving credit on research projects to people in more technical roles, and in particular recognising that the work they do constitutes research. Nevertheless, there is still much work needed to give these roles due recognition – for example, there is still work to be done to ensure that Research Software Engineers are able to use this recognition effectively in managing their own career journeys; current university systems in the UK hinder promotional advancement in this category.

²⁶See <https://github.com/kingsdigitallab/sdlc-for-rse/wiki/Research-Software-Engineering-roles>

Institutional barriers and culture of participation

Both groups face challenges in sustaining broad, inclusive participation. UK scholars worry about hidden work and the need to “actively build” networks, while Chinese scholars cite “institutional obstacles” and note the fact that “there has not really been a pure, full-fledged collaboration”, and that “the openness of data is very difficult” as significant barriers.

UK scholars have historically had a strong participation culture, but this has been hampered at times by the lack of a UK-specific professional association. Our study suggests that events such as the biannual Digital Humanities Congress and the Oxford DH Summer School have been important in strengthening networks, and following the formation of the UK-Ireland DH professional association, the field has started to feel more connected and “open” to a wider set of people than used to be the case.

Participation is often rooted in strong connections to home disciplines, with scholars able to “think of yourself as a classicist or whatever and be part of that culture”, and there is a tradition of welcoming those who do not self-identify as digital humanists. The UK context values collaboration across institutions, especially with large GLAM institutions, and supports diverse forms of knowledge – in the word of one person, “the AHRC’s work around that with RLUK (Research Libraries UK) and so on has been really beneficial in acknowledging and recognizing the academic and scholarly value of different forms of knowledge”. There is pride in being “one of the most open and inclusive and participatory research cultures”, yet some scholars point out that **participation often centres on the needs of DH researchers rather than empowering the public** and that sometimes participation is taken to mean: “what can the public provide? How can the public provide information for me? Rather than, how can a digital humanities approach enable people to do things that they want to do?” Collaborative doctoral awards and interdisciplinary projects are cited as positive examples, but there are concerns that DH work remains “too much focused on DH needs, not outward looking enough”.

In contrast, **Chinese scholars describe a participation culture that is more individually driven but also shaped by hierarchy and collective organization**. Many scholars observe, “China’s current participation in the digital humanities is still driven by personal interest”. However, institutional and cultural barriers persist: “Domestically, there’s still a reluctance to participate, with pressures of academic titles or academic pursuits”. Nevertheless, teamwork and collective organization are increasingly important, especially for large-scale projects: “China is definitely still collective. The state is also advocating so-called ‘organised scientific research’”.²⁷ Hierarchical structures are common, with projects sometimes “dominated by one scholar, and the other scholars are assisting in aiding [their] work [...] generally to serve the research needs of a prestigious or deep humanities scholar, and then to develop around their research goals”. Collaboration is often informal and based on personal networks: “there is still more cooperation in small teams...the personal network of scholars is more important,” and “the more common one is individually driven. [...] but there may be some limitations in terms of the sustainability of the motivation and the level of research”.

²⁷This refers to a 2022 policy from the Chinese Ministry of Education which advocates for research to be strategically planned and co-ordinated at institutional, as opposed to individual, level.

Career pathways

In the UK, digital humanities career pathways are marked by institutional variation, fluidity, and ongoing negotiation of professional identity. What emerges from our study is **a need for clearer articulation by the field around the academic journeys and development it facilitates**. Since the academic pathway is relatively stable and well understood, much of people's attention focuses on "non-academic" DH posts and roles. The debate is generally more functional in tone than that found in discussion of the "Alt Ac" phenomenon in the US for example, and much of it is centred around the Research Software Engineer (RSE) role, which aims to give those working in technical roles a stronger professional identity and more stable career pathways. There is still work to be done here – one respondent notes that RSEs working in computing sciences "have much more structured career pathways" and tend to be paid better – but the establishment of a framework for RSEs (and other associated roles such as Research Software Analyst) has been important in developing practical roles in the UK, which somewhat help to meet the challenges in retaining technical staff. Our interviews suggest that more could be done to explore differences between (and perhaps better align) technical/RSE profiles in the academic DH and GLAM sector.

In China, digital humanities career pathways are less established and face their own challenges. Most digital humanities roles are found in libraries, archives, or as extensions of traditional teaching and research positions, where "positions that do resource building are also digital humanities positions", and "librarians who do digitisation are also part of the digital humanities work". There are very few dedicated DH roles in industry or museums, and "the job market doesn't really have a perception of digital humanities right now". Some scholars express cautious concern about the rapid establishment of new DH programs. There is also a sense of uncertainty about employment prospects, as "the first cohort of DH graduates is entering the job market, many of whom come from institutions that are still developing their academic reputation". Others are more optimistic, seeing DH as "an iteration or an update, an evolutionary state of other positions", and envisioning a future where **DH graduates "empower various traditional industries"** and find roles in "digital culture enterprises". There is a strong desire for "recognition in the academic field of scholars and research that is as interdisciplinary as digital humanities", and for "a specialised digital humanities career and an assessment system suitable for digital humanities teaching".

Evaluating digital humanities research

UK

“Digital projects make senior administrators uncomfortable. The emphasis on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK breeds a heavy focus on high quality ‘outputs’, which in humanities institutional thinking tends to translate into books and articles to the detriment of more explorative/experimental publication. This has a heavy impact on both recruitment and promotion evaluation dynamics”.

CN

“Only with a more accurate and appropriate assessment system and indicators can we promote the development of an interdisciplinary research field and the construction of its talent team”.

Landscape of evaluation

Both UK and Chinese interviewees underscore the **continued dominance of traditional academic frameworks** in evaluating digital humanities research. In China, this is particularly entrenched through systems that prioritise CSSCI-indexed²⁸ journal publications. The pressure to conform to these norms often sidelines innovative DH outputs like databases, tools, or visualizations, which are harder to classify within conventional academic achievement categories. In the UK, a periodic national evaluation exercise called the Research Excellence Framework (REF)²⁹ has a considerable influence on university strategy, reputation and funding. While digital humanities research is often attractive to academic units when submitting their REF impact case studies, there are numerous challenges in how DH research is evaluated for REF. These in turn reflect challenges in evaluating innovative and interdisciplinary digital scholarship in the humanities more generally.

A shared concern among scholars from both countries is the **absence of formal evaluation mechanisms** specifically tailored to DH. UK researchers lament the lack of a dedicated DH panel within the REF, resulting in DH work being fragmented across various disciplinary units, often assessed by reviewers unfamiliar with its methodologies. This dilution not only obscures institutional achievements in DH but also risks misinterpretation or underappreciation of its value. In the words of one interviewee: “I tend to be evaluated by people who don’t know that much about DH, which means that they’re probably not pointing out flaws in what I’m doing, as well as not being supportive of the elements that I think deserve to be more supported more”. Chinese scholars echo similar concerns, noting the absence of **clear evaluation policies for interdisciplinary or digital outputs**. Without established benchmarks or rubrics which can be applied across the humanities, innovative research is often marginalised or misjudged.

While some UK institutions have in some cases developed **internal guidance** to help with REF submissions of digital work (Ciula, A., Esposito, A. and Wijaya, F., 2025), Chinese scholars report a **general lack of policy frameworks and technical review protocols**, leaving DH researchers to navigate an ambiguous evaluative landscape. While some work has been done in some countries to propose evaluation frameworks in DH (or in digital scholarship more generally),³⁰ it is also true **that there**

²⁸The Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index, <https://cssrac.nju.edu.cn/cpx/zwshkxywxy/index.html>

²⁹See <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/>

³⁰See <https://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Professional-Issues/Committee-on-Information-Technology/Guidelines-for-Evaluating-Digital-Scholarship> or <https://coara.eu/>

are still no widely adopted international benchmarks for DH research evaluation which could be applied here.

The **difficulty in finding qualified reviewers** is a shared frustration among UK and Chinese DH scholars. The absence of specialised DH or interdisciplinary reviewers in both countries can lead to an overreliance on conventional disciplinary evaluators who may not grasp the methodological rigour or scholarly contribution of digital projects. This evaluative mismatch may deter researchers from pursuing non-traditional research paths and risks reinforcing a conservative research culture. In the UK, DH's interdisciplinary nature and dynamic technical scope can make it hard to assemble panels with appropriate expertise, whether for the REF or other evaluation exercises (such as those used to make funding decisions, or in internal institutional assessment, for example). Steps taken by the AHRC to include evaluators with a cultural heritage sector background for the assessment of funding proposals are welcomed, but one respondent feels that “we could be more imaginative still about going beyond that” in identifying evaluators across different assessment scenarios.

Research outputs

The UK REF has well-established mechanisms for reviewing non-traditional outputs, and such outputs are often reviewed favourably when they are actually submitted, but UK interviewees express frustration with how these are evaluated internally at their institution before they get to that stage. Some feel that digital projects make senior administrators uncomfortable, and some interviewees report **pressure from risk-adverse administrators to submit traditional outputs** (monographs and articles) rather than more innovative outputs, in part because “they know what a good article looks like, but they don't know what a good digital output looks like”.

Similarly, Chinese scholars describe a strong monograph culture and a general lack of recognition for non-traditional outputs, most of which are excluded from official evaluation systems. As a result, Chinese scholars face greater difficulty securing promotions or research funding based solely on DH contributions, unless their work is tied to state-recognised goals, and this disincentivises innovation, particularly among early-career scholars who rely on recognised outputs for promotion and job security.

As a result, the **intellectual labour invested in digital modelling or tool development often goes unrecognized in the evaluation process**. This lack of recognition for new forms of scholarly output hampers both career advancement and the broader legitimization of DH practices in academic cultures that remain largely text-centric and driven by print-based models of publication.

Likewise, software or data as outputs are still poorly understood in many humanities contexts in China/the UK (and beyond), which has implications for highly computational research.³¹

³¹Although in recent years the concept of open humanities data has gained traction - see <https://openhumanitiesdata.metajnl.com/>

The future of DH evaluation

³²See <https://transformations.episciences.org/>

UK scholars point to a growing movement towards open science, where the publication of open data, open-source code, digital tools and research artefacts produced at different stages in the research process is gaining traction.³² The increasing emphasis of UK and other European funders on openness and reuse has begun to shift university attitudes towards preserving and showcasing DH projects. Nevertheless, scholars also express a desire for more freedom to experiment and a faster publication culture, as current systems often stifle innovation. Chinese scholars, while recognizing the transformative potential of digital methodologies, report feeling constrained by slow-moving institutional structures and conservative journal cultures. The lack of openness in publication norms and the absence of technical documentation standards further limit innovation. In both contexts, scholars advocate for a research environment that values experimentation, supports open dissemination, and reflects the evolving nature of scholarly work in the digital age.

Teaching and training

The main focus of this study is on digital humanities research, rather than teaching, but in our brief section on teaching, we asked participants about the kind of DH teaching they are currently engaged with, the topics they think DH should be teaching, and any changes they would like to see in how the subject is taught. We believe that more in-depth comparative studies on teaching digital humanities across different geographic and administrative boundaries in future would be helpful.

The current state of DH teaching

A major factor in the growth of digital humanities in the UK has been the investment in digital humanities teaching programmes, in particular at Master's level from the start of the century (the first MA in Digital Humanities in the UK started in 2002). There is currently no digital humanities programme at undergraduate level in the UK, but there have been a number of doctoral programmes in digital humanities there since 2005 (McCarty, 2012).

Our study confirms that the growth in DH programmes has had several important effects on the field, which would be worthy of more detailed research in the future. Firstly, they have helped to cement DH's institutional presence, whether as departments or centres. Secondly, they have helped to improve recognition for DH as a serious academic field within the humanities as a whole. Engaging with the real-life aspirations of students at various levels – and from various cultural and academic backgrounds – has helped the field to stay 'fresh' and to contemplate its social and educational role in more depth. And finally, they have increasingly helped to develop the digital humanists of the future, and to improve awareness in related professional fields.

As noted elsewhere, there are still **not clear pathways to becoming a digital humanist from undergraduate to postgraduate (MA) level** and then to doctoral studies, and several interviewees advocate introducing undergraduate programmes in digital humanities in order to create a more meaningful educational journey in digital humanities and to develop a “more robust” pipeline in DH-related careers. There are also concerns over PhD funding, and a worry that more hands-on or technical digital humanities PhDs are more challenging and so less attractive.

There has been much work on decolonising curricula in recent years and on addressing inclusion and diversity challenges in DH education, but there has been little attention to internationalising the curriculum or in fostering better inter-cultural awareness to take full advantage of what in the UK are often highly globally diverse student cohorts. Several interviewees observe that, for example, their programmes might benefit from a higher and broader engagement with Chinese DH, given the number of Chinese students on their programmes.

In teaching, as in research, there is a divide between institutions where DH has a stable institutional presence and others where that is not the case. Some describe having to teach DH “by stealth”, and it is clear that there is still very low visibility for DH as an academic taught subject, despite some progress in recent years. A few respondents propose paying better attention to dissemination and marketing about DH teaching, and moving beyond the traditional focus on postgraduate level programmes. They feel that this could happen from “school leavers onwards” and that it should demonstrate the way in which DH connects to how we create and interpret culture in the 21st century.

In China, the development of digital humanities education has evolved significantly in recent years, moving from a few PhD and Master’s programmes in select universities to the introduction of undergraduate courses, such as those at Inner Mongolia Normal University³³ and Neijiang Normal College³⁴. Interviewees believe this is a growing trend, with one stating, “I think we are now at a stage where the discipline is not fully established, but the demand is there, and it seems to have become a trend”. However, there is a cautious attitude towards whether undergraduate programmes in DH should be offered, a point that was explored in the professionalization section.

Some institutions are fostering collaboration across departments to offer interdisciplinary DH electives, expanding access to a broader student body. This reflects a growing institutional commitment in China to formalise and broaden DH education. Chinese scholars describe a shift in pedagogy from a focus on technical tools to the cultivation of critical thinking and creative application: “students must go beyond technical training to understand DH applications in innovative ways”. The goal is to help students break through disciplinary boundaries, rethink research problems, and apply DH tools in intellectually meaningful contexts to resolve the problems.

Chinese respondents also highlight specific interdisciplinary initiatives aimed at expanding DH’s reach and impact. These initiatives often lead to elective courses that are open to students across different disciplines, covering topics such as GIS, corpus annotation, and large language models. For instance, Renmin University offers DH education at all academic levels, from undergraduate to doctoral programmes. Some Chinese responses stress **the importance of combining technical instruction**

³³See <https://mxy.imnu.edu.cn/info/1179/2730.htm>

³⁴See <https://wx.njtc.edu.cn/info/1030/54401.htm>

with creative problem-solving, suggesting that meaningful learning requires more than tool familiarity. Several Chinese scholars have developed self-compiled textbooks tailored to local needs and university curricula. These materials not only support formal courses but also serve as foundational resources for electives offered across departments. This attention to curriculum design reflects a more proactive institutional investment in formalizing and localizing DH content.

There is **currently no benchmarking effort for digital humanities teaching programmes across global boundaries** – one key area in teaching where regional or international co-operation might have benefits.

Training outside the formal classroom—through workshops, summer schools, and co-taught programmes—is recognized as essential in both countries, though perspectives on their effectiveness differ. UK scholars frequently reference well-known programmes but some feel that the field would also benefit from a format which sat between one-off training formats and full degree programmes: intermediate-level training that provides depth and sustained engagement without the time commitment of full degrees. In China, similar formats exist, but scholars express concern about their limited reach, particularly in the face of rapid technological advancement.

What should be taught

UK and Chinese DH scholars alike emphasise the importance of interdisciplinarity as a foundation for digital humanities education. Both agree that students must be grounded in core humanities disciplines while gaining exposure to computational thinking and digital tools. UK scholars tend to highlight the need for critical engagement with digital methods, encouraging students to interrogate the epistemological implications of using technology in humanistic inquiry. Chinese scholars also advocate for a cross-disciplinary framework, though with a more pragmatic focus on bridging cultural heritage studies, information science, and digital technology.

Both groups agree that students must gain familiarity with key digital tools and computational methods, though their emphases differ. UK scholars typically underscore the importance of teaching data literacy and coding fundamentals, as well as broader skills in such topics as data management, visualization, and GIS. Chinese scholars also prioritise the acquisition of digital skills but often centre on toolkits used in local practice, such as OCR for classical Chinese texts and metadata creation for archives.

Teaching students how to work with digital archives and cultural heritage is a shared priority, but it carries different connotations in the two contexts. In the UK, DH educators often treat digital archives as a means to raise questions about access, curation, and public history. In China, cultural heritage is often positioned as a key site for national memory and identity, and DH training emphasizes digitization, preservation, and interpretation of classical texts and historical documents.

UK and Chinese DH scholars both advocate for project-based learning, believing it provides essential experience in applying digital tools to real-world research

questions. UK scholars describe collaborative, inquiry-driven projects as central to DH pedagogy, often involving interdisciplinary teams and open-ended exploration. In contrast, Chinese scholars also emphasise the value of hands-on learning but often integrate it into large-scale, top-down projects tied to institutional or governmental priorities.

UK scholars place strong emphasis on embedding ethical reflection and critical theory within DH curricula. Topics such as algorithmic bias and digital colonialism are often considered essential for preparing students to think critically about the digital world. In contrast, Chinese scholars are less likely to foreground digital ethics or political critique in DH teaching, though there is a growing interest in topics like data responsibility and the social impact of AI.

Both UK and Chinese scholars identify communication and storytelling as key skills for DH students, though their approaches vary. UK scholars often encourage students to produce public-facing outputs as a way to translate research for wider audiences. Chinese scholars also recognise the importance of digital communication but focus more on how DH can contribute to public education and national cultural dissemination.

THE COMPUTATIONAL TURN

CN

“I don't think the application of AI is going to change by human will. I think it's overblown right now, but it's definitely going to grow beyond many people's expectations, and it's impossible to overstate how important it is to talk about it. It's similar in every field to how digitisation swept through our entire society in the past. Artificial intelligence is its advanced stage.”

Computational humanities

³⁵We thank Arianna Ciula for this observation

³⁶See <https://livingwithmachines.ac.uk/> and <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/issa>

In recent years we have seen a computational turn (**some would see it as a ‘return’³⁵**) in the humanities, as a result of the increasing availability of cultural and social data at scale, along with computational methods and tools to query them. A wide variety of overlapping or complementary terms and techniques are associated with this computational turn – such as Cultural Analytics, Distant Reading, Macroanalysis, Web Archive Studies, Text and Data Mining, Network Analysis, Data Visualization, Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence – although the extent of its influence on mainstream humanities research to date is open to debate. Computational methods allow researchers to analyse vast amounts of data (as text, images, audio and/or visual media) at scale in order to uncover linguistic, thematic or historical patterns that are not readily visible through close reading and qualitative approaches.

The **digital humanities have provided the humanities/cultural sector with an important space for experimenting with computational methods** and analysing their effects: in the UK through projects such as Living with Machines and Intelligent Systems for Screen Archives (ISSA),³⁶ or reports such as the Alan Turing Institute’s White Paper on humanities and data science, and in China, projects such as Harvard’s CBDB, Markus at Leiden University and Docusky in Taiwan University provide examples of computational data modelling and analysis.

Respondents in both the UK and China highlight the increased prevalence of computational tools, methods and infrastructure as one of the key trends in digital humanities in recent years, and one of the major challenges for the field going forward. There is a slight difference in focus – for example greater emphasis on corpus linguistics in the UK, and on historical GIS in China – but in both countries, major attention is being given to how to make computational methods more accessible to a wider set of researchers within DH and the humanities more broadly, and there is growing debate about what this means for how we carry out humanities research in the future.

There are **mixed feelings within the UK about the perception that DH is increasingly becoming defined by advanced computational methods**, and hence too closely associated with quantitative approaches (at least in the popular humanities imagination), and some are concerned that funding for large-scale and highly computational projects could increasingly supplant smaller projects following qualitative methodologies. Meanwhile, other people feel that the digital humanities (and the humanities more generally) urgently needs to engage more fully with

the potential (and the risks) of computational and AI-based approaches. Some interviewees note that born digital research (such as that studying Web Archives) is becoming more mainstream in humanities research, which opens up new opportunities for studying contemporary culture using social media and other forms of transmedia or digital culture.

A similar story presents itself in relation to the teaching of computationally related topics. UK scholars place **strong emphasis on embedding ethical reflection and critical theory** within DH curricula. Topics such as algorithmic bias, digital colonialism, accessibility, and open access are often considered essential for preparing students to think critically about the digital world. This reflects a broader orientation towards “critical digital humanities” discourse. In contrast, Chinese scholars are less likely to foreground digital ethics or political critique in DH teaching, though some express **a growing interest in topics like data responsibility, digital rights, and the social impact of AI**. Instead, there is often more focus on practical outcomes—such as how DH supports cultural industries, economic innovation, or national educational goals. However, there is an emerging awareness among Chinese scholars of the need to incorporate global perspectives and critical reflection, suggesting potential convergence in the future.

Data and collections at scale

Our interviewees highlight the enormous and under-realised potential of cultural and social data distributed across humanities research projects, GLAM institutions (GLAMs) and other sources of data produced by the creative industries or the general public.

In China, **GLAMs have a large amount of cultural data**, but the lack of openness and sharing of data has proven a barrier to collaboration between GLAMs and academic research organizations. In the UK, some cultural heritage representatives in our study argue that the downstream skills and methods for querying this content have largely been established by the digital humanities, but what is still lacking is access to the raw materials of research and cultural production (at volume) which would allow for more sophisticated cross-collection and cross-sector analysis, either up close or at scale.

The Living with Machines project, which brought together data science and historians in order to study the industrial revolution through massive historical newspaper collections and spatial data, by fusing a variety of computational methods (including Natural Language Processing) to study trends in historical language use and Computer Vision to perform classification of features in maps, is seen as the kind of digital humanities-GLAM sector collaboration which could lay the groundwork for this.

GLAM practitioners we interviewed agree that **the GLAM and digital humanities research agendas have converged to a significant extent in the UK in recent years**, building on a common interest around how to make large scale digitised collections in archives, galleries and museums both more accessible for research and more relevant to audiences. At international level, the OpenGLAM, Collections as Data and Open cultural data movement (often using museum APIs) have been key reference points in this regard.

The AHRC's Towards a National Collection (TaNC) research programme has been an important factor in exploring how we might create a unified collection of digitised cultural heritage, making collections-based research workflows and data more interoperable while also demonstrating their value.

AI and DH

AI research is growing in both the UK and China, but sometimes with a different emphasis from a (digital) humanities perspective. While Artificial Intelligence does not form a primary focus of this study, it is widely acknowledged by our interviewees that emerging technologies like Generative AI are bringing about rapid transformations in cultural practice, and that digital humanities are likely to play an important part in debates about how to adapt to these new realities.

In China, particularly, policies surrounding digitization and AI integration into teaching are driving forward DH research. This aligns with broader national goals like "Building Digital China" (数字中国) and promoting data assetization, which indirectly benefit DH. However, there is also a strong focus on cultural heritage and traditional resources, such as ancient books.

Some feel that **there is a sense that the digital humanities should engage more with AI, but that the field in general has not been entirely comfortable in taking on the challenges it raises**. There is generally a lack of detailed understanding in the humanities about how AI works, what it does and what this actually means for society and culture, and so some feel that "there is a key role for DH in levelling out the fear and anxiety with a real understanding on what it actually does". Some Chinese scholars optimise their use through large language models and they think that the impact of AI, particularly large language models, on digital humanities has been significant, lowering the technology threshold and allowing for better integration of these models into research. They emphasise AI's potential to improve research efficiency, especially in processing large texts and uncovering relationships, which remains a key advantage in DH.

Our study suggests that **in the UK, DH scholars tend to be more active in critiquing AI, or exploring AI bias, ethics and legal issues; whereas in China, AI integration is being pushed more actively, and there is arguably more institutional enthusiasm towards AI's role in fostering cultural production**. Nevertheless, in both countries there are voices who feel that, while the impact of AI is undeniable, its effects are in danger of being "overblown" – one researcher argues that for their humanities field, "AI and large language models are simply not appropriate right now". There are also doubts in both countries about the effect AI would have on (digital) humanities research agendas – with concerns that it is in danger of dominating both academic and funding agendas in the future.

Right now, there is understandably a lot of focus on Generative AI, and on how students interact with GPT, but some UK respondents feel that DH researchers need to become more active in AI design and development processes. This includes advocating for more democratic access to AI tools, representing a diversity of voices, ensuring that they integrate humanistic values as well as technical design. It also

entails making sure that “opportunities driven by the needs of arts and humanities researchers push the edges of AI or other critical technologies” rather than simply accepting general purpose and ‘out of the box’ AI ‘solutions’.

Although AI/ML tools are recognized as valuable, interviewees in both countries feel that many humanities researchers lack the training or interdisciplinary skills to use them effectively at present.

On a practical level, interviewees in the UK identify **a need to build digital humanities infrastructure at scale and to make high-performance computing more accessible to a wider audience** – an “on-ramp” for researchers who are not used to working in this way, with some “hand-holding” to help navigate new and sometimes complex infrastructure. In China, interviewees agree that while DH is still largely practice-driven, there is **a need for a guiding theoretical structure—especially in relation to AI, ethics, and cognition**, where “there is a pressing need for philosophical and linguistic-based theories, especially with AI development”.

Finally, as technology becomes more and more advanced, our ability to understand how it works and what the effects will be, is diminished, which will be a major challenge for DH in future. These kinds of projects are likely to require large groups of highly specialized (and in many cases highly technical researchers), which brings with it a very different model for (digital) humanities research.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND OUTCOMES

UK

“It’s absolutely the space to be in if you want to be doing exciting things at the moment and understanding what’s going on around us [in a cultural space]”.

DH and knowledge production

In this section, we asked interviewees about how the digital humanities create new knowledge. Digital humanists have often found it difficult to articulate this in ways which are both agreed across the field and understood by a wider audience, but in our view, it is important to ask this question in order to understand the field’s perception of its role in producing knowledge, and to identify common threads running across geocultural borders and sub-fields within DH. In general terms, responses to this question are similar between the two countries.

Building

One central theme within the anglophone digital humanities has been “building”, and while there is unresolved debate around what that entails (and how technical this act of building needs to be), this is reflected in particular among UK respondents, who confirm wider understandings of DH as a practice-based discipline which is centred on creating new knowledge tools and infrastructures, something which is “ontologically very different” from the research which occurs in most sister-disciplines in the humanities.

Chinese interviewees also agree that DH is widely seen as generating new knowledge, emphasizing its ability to uncover hidden patterns, create novel methodologies, and push disciplinary boundaries. However, some of them believe that DH is more about reorganizing and uncovering knowledge rather than creating entirely new insights, “a shift in methodology, a shift in paradigm” which acts as “a kind of midwife for new knowledge. It’s not going directly to create knowledge”.

Space

People from both cohorts identify both advantages and disadvantages as a result of the liminal space the digital humanities tend to occupy. While there are often challenges in defining or gaining recognition for DH’s unique contribution

to knowledge in collaborative ventures, as one Chinese respondent remarks, **innovation often happens at the boundary between disciplines**. And at least one UK study participant feels that “it’s absolutely the space to be in if you want to be doing exciting things at the moment and understanding what’s going on around us [in a cultural space]”.

Generating meta-knowledge about humanities practices

Some UK scholars particularly emphasise how DH creates meta-knowledge—knowledge about how knowledge is structured, produced, and circulated. In this reading, by digitizing archives, encoding texts, or designing databases, scholars are prompted to reflect critically on the assumptions embedded in traditional categories, such as authorship, genre, or periodization. Digital methods thus serve not only to analyse content but also to question inherited scholarly frameworks. This reflexive dimension is central to many UK scholars’ understanding of DH’s intellectual contribution. In contrast, Chinese scholars engage with meta-knowledge more implicitly, often through the structuring of taxonomies or ontologies in digital projects. Their emphasis lies in standardizing and modernizing traditional knowledge systems for contemporary use, with less overt critique of disciplinary paradigms. In short, while UK scholars more often foreground epistemological disruption, Chinese scholars highlight epistemological systematization and integration.

Enabling multimodal and transversal forms of knowledge

Both UK and Chinese DH scholars point to the integrated analysis of complex arrangements of text, image, sound, and spatial data as a distinctive contribution of digital humanities to knowledge creation. In the UK context, this transversality (sometimes accompanied by multimodality) is often linked to the breakdown of disciplinary boundaries, allowing for collaborations between the humanities, computer science, design, and information studies. New insights emerge when literature is analysed visually, when art history incorporates spatial analytics, or when performance studies are augmented with digital media documentation. Chinese scholars similarly embrace transversal and multimodal approaches, particularly in heritage studies, digital epigraphy, and interactive exhibitions. The research outcomes of digital humanities are more easily accessible and understandable to students, younger generations, and the general public through visualization methods such as 3D scanning and virtual simulations, while UK scholars are more likely to treat multimodal formats as experimental provocations that generate layered interpretations. Thus, the affordances of multimodality are appreciated in both contexts, but their epistemic roles are framed differently.

Supporting role or autonomous role for DH?

Interviewees from both groups affirm that DH is not merely an application of technology to the humanities, but a reconfiguration of how knowledge is made, shared, and imagined in the digital age. However, there are diverging opinions among respondents (within each country) about whether DH is principally about supporting transformation in the humanities, or whether it should rather forge its own autonomous research agenda.

There is a growing sense particularly among UK interviewees that the **digital humanities need to demonstrate leadership around some key challenges in digital research**. These vary from practical considerations to issues around diversity and inclusion. Practical issues include sustainability of projects and infrastructures, citation of emerging research objects, or acknowledging hidden labour. Diversity challenges include doing more to integrate people from different social backgrounds or improving support for multilingualism (and in particular non-English DH) in digital research platforms.

One interviewee remarks that “a common issue today is that the essence of digital humanities is somewhat underpinned by English-language hegemony” and lacks representation from the Global South. Some Chinese scholars emphasise **the need for active participation in academic discourse**, criticizing resource-focused collaborations without academic depth. They also note that “China’s own infrastructure is not well integrated, and there are limited connections” with global projects.

Rethinking authorship, collaboration, and the humanities public

Another key theme is the transformation of scholarly authorship and collaboration. UK DH scholars frequently stress the shift from solitary authorship towards team-based research models that involve librarians, developers, designers, and scholars. This collaborative mode is seen as both a necessity and an opportunity to democratise knowledge production, encouraging co-authorship, open peer review, and participatory archives. Chinese scholars also recognise the importance of collaboration, especially in large-scale national projects where university researchers, government units, and tech companies work together. However, collaboration in the Chinese context is more often framed in terms of institutional synergy and project management, with less emphasis on authorship transformation or public co-creation. The **concept of the “humanities public”** also differs: UK scholars often advocate for DH as a bridge between academia and diverse audiences through digital storytelling or citizen science, while Chinese responses focus more on disseminating authoritative cultural knowledge to a broad, often educationally-focused, public. This highlights differing visions of digital humanities’ social engagement and knowledge democratization.

Scale and computational humanities

Both UK and Chinese DH scholars acknowledge that digital humanities allow scholars to pose new types of research questions, often driven by computational capacities that exceed traditional humanistic methods. UK scholars emphasise how digital tools enable the formulation of hypotheses based on large datasets, network analysis, and spatial mapping, which in turn reshape the nature of humanistic inquiry. These methods not only expand the scale of analysis but also prompt theoretical reflection on what constitutes evidence, context, and meaning in a digital environment. Chinese scholars similarly highlight that DH supports new inquiries by enabling the processing of massive historical or literary corpora, allowing researchers to detect hidden trends, lexical changes, or regional variations. However, the Chinese focus often lies in harnessing these tools to explore classical texts, local gazetteers, and heritage data, with the aim of deepening cultural interpretation rather than interrogating digital epistemologies themselves. Thus, while both sides value computational innovation, UK scholars often stress critical method development, whereas Chinese scholars focus on extending cultural and historical research capacities.

DH and ‘Big challenges’

Some UK respondents point to **the way in which the sciences have had success in focusing around global challenges** such as pandemics, the environment or food provision and articulating their impact there, and this is seen by some as a model to follow. They feel that DH does not currently attend to these kinds of questions enough, but that there are many issues which “DH is very well positioned to talk about” in areas such as misinformation or understanding the effect of digital life on human culture and society. One interviewee with a history in the funding and digital service sectors says that if they went to a DH conference they would expect to hear about a “a lot of very, very specific projects” and that it is “all very, very granular”, which is understandable to some extent because that is how humanities research often functions. But at the same time, they ask how DH might find ways to thread together projects and methods and publications to respond to major global issues, such as climate change: “I think we need to try and start talking about digital humanities in the context of big challenges”.

Managing our relationship to technology

As we have seen DH has played a key role in advocating for, ideating and evaluating new research infrastructures, and has endeavoured to supersede the historically passive relationship of the humanities to new technology and the tech industry with one where the humanities demonstrate their value in areas such as ethics, design and critical analysis. Respondents argue that **DH should be more proactive in engaging with** industry and demonstrating that it has something to say about a

range of matters from modelling cultural objects or digital skills and literacies, to the ethics of data capture or power dynamics and digital infrastructures. Leading voices in the UK emphasise that DH in the UK needs to avoid stagnation around technologies of the past: “technology moves on a pace and we’re not bringing humanities with it” and needs to constantly engage with technologies at the cutting edge and ask, “what can it do for us?” In this vision, the DH enables the arts and humanities to have greater agency over the future of technical development and its application in culture and society.

Chinese scholars believe that **digital humanities is not merely an application of technology to the humanities, but a reconfiguration of how knowledge is created, shared, and imagined in the digital age.** In the past, the development of DH in China focused more on texts and digitization. Although digitization remains important, there is now greater attention on AI and large models.

Conclusions

In summary, in both the UK and China, digital humanities are seen as generative of new knowledge across multiple dimensions: methodological, infrastructural, multimodal, and epistemological. But there are differences too, reflecting each country’s broader institutional, historical, and cultural contexts. While UK scholars often foreground critical reflexivity, methodological pluralism, and public engagement, Chinese scholars emphasise infrastructure, cultural continuity, and national-scale applications.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

UK

I think there are some so many amazing PhD students from China who are doing DH research in the UK and Ireland as well, but that can promote collaboration, either because they stay in the UK or when they go back to China then you have got that collaboration ongoing and so I think that is something that's happening at individual level rather than any anything more formal.

CN

I think international co-operation is still on a rather shallow level. In terms of research institutes, we have held a workshop with [Institution Name] and discussed with them the intention of cooperation, but the procedure is rather complicated for both schools.

In this section we asked interviewees which countries they most commonly collaborate with, how well represented they feel that their country (UK or China) is internationally, and what changes they would like to see in global representation in the future.

Both UK and Chinese DH interviewees are deeply embedded in global research networks, though they navigate very different institutional, cultural, and political ecosystems. Shared aspirations for meaningful international collaboration are clear, as is mutual recognition of systemic challenges: from funding and mobility to ideological alignment and policy fragmentation. UK scholars tend to rely on flexible, individually-driven, and funding-oriented collaborations, while Chinese scholars emphasise institutional prestige, regional proximity, and structured cooperation. Yet in both contexts, there is a growing awareness that the future of DH depends not only on technical capacity but also on navigating cultural differences and promoting sustainable, ethical engagement across borders.

Primary countries of collaboration

Both UK-based and China-based DH scholars predominantly collaborate with partners in the United States, United Kingdom, and Europe. For UK scholars, collaboration with European Union countries stands out, sometimes supported historically by EU-funded programmes like Horizon. English-speaking countries such as the United States and Canada also feature prominently, often facilitated by shared language and cultural ties. A number also foreground the relationship with DH in Ireland, where specific joint interventions by funding agencies³⁷ have built on existing connections, benefitting from what one person describes as “a shared cultural history around how universities work”, and the fact that UK DH is strategically connected to Ireland through a joint professional association is only likely to fortify this. Chinese scholars similarly identify the US and UK as primary international collaborators, particularly through joint research, teaching, and publications. Germany and other European countries such as France and Finland also appear in Chinese responses, although they are less central than in the UK dataset. Notably, Chinese scholars cite South

³⁷See <https://research.ie/partnerships/uk-research-and-innovation-ukri/>

Korea, Japan, and Singapore as key Asian partners, reflecting geographical proximity and shared regional academic interests—an axis less present in UK responses. Kazakhstan and Russia are also mentioned by Chinese scholars, highlighting a broader regional network across Central and East Asia.

Nature and types of collaboration

In terms of collaboration types, both UK and Chinese scholars engage in academic research, co-authorship, research exchanges, and conference participation. For UK scholars, formal collaboration often emerges from funding-driven structures, such as participation in EU projects or transnational partnerships supported by joint institutional frameworks. In contrast, Chinese scholars emphasise joint book writing, co-training of talent, and shared use of research infrastructures like databases and genealogical resources. Chinese responses also include more examples of institution-led collaborations, such as government-organized conferences (e.g., World Congress of Classics), and often reference prestige, institutional support, and alignment with national strategies as primary motivators.

UK scholars show an inclination towards individual or department-level partnerships tied to researcher mobility, historic relationships, or shared research interests at an individual level. Collaborations are described as growing organically through shared epistemologies or the presence of international scholars in UK institutions. While both groups engage in conferences and workshops, Chinese scholars more frequently frame these within formal institutional agreements and policy-driven initiatives, often with state backing.

Barriers and challenges to collaboration

Both groups report limitations caused by **geopolitical factors, institutional barriers, and structural limitations**, though with differing emphases. UK scholars focus on the aftermath of Brexit, including disruption in access to Europe funding, visa issues, and bureaucratic constraints on cross-border partnerships, although recent events provide more optimism here and, in any case, European relationships remain strong in the sector. They also mention the **impact of global fragmentation** and express concern about a growing difficulty in sustaining long-term collaborations, especially with countries affected by political instability. Chinese scholars, meanwhile, highlight barriers such as restricted international travel, institutional inertia, lack of leadership consensus, and uneven openness between Chinese and Western institutions. Specific missed opportunities—such as one failed collaboration with a prominent UK GLAM institution—are noted with some frustration. We did not receive many responses relating to other countries, but while UK scholars acknowledge limited collaboration with the Global South due to infrastructural and epistemological gaps, Chinese scholars mention Russia and Central Asia as partners, though these ties are described as unequal or surface-level.

Reflections on global DH structures and equity

UK scholars articulate a degree of self-awareness about power asymmetries in global DH and the need to build non-extractive, equitable partnerships, particularly with the Global South, which is not always reflected in institutional policies. They reflect critically on the limitations of traditional collaboration models and the need for more inclusive digital humanities networks, sometimes citing the importance of building links across linguistic and cultural divides. Chinese scholars also express the desire for deeper collaboration but identify lack of policy coordination and internal fragmentation as impediments. There is a strong sense that **international partnerships are still largely transactional and elite-driven**, rather than deeply integrated or sustained over time. While UK respondents discuss the disciplinary ethics of DH in global terms, Chinese interviewees often focus on operational barriers and institutional alignment, suggesting that while the desire for global engagement exists, practical and political realities constrain implementation.

Geopolitical influence on collaborative dynamics

Both UK and Chinese scholars recognise the influence of geopolitics on shaping (and limiting) international DH collaboration. For UK scholars, Brexit in particular has complicated ties with European and other countries, with rising concern over how academic collaboration will be impacted by the rise of nationalist politics and shrinking internationalism. Some express hope that universities can still function as bridges across cultures despite these headwinds. Chinese scholars, on the other hand, express anxiety over increasing Western restrictions and internal institutional hesitancy, noting that collaboration is often limited to paper-based or symbolic exchanges. Cases where cooperation ceased due to political shifts (e.g., the ending of some US collaborations) illustrate how external and internal politics jointly stifle deeper integration, even when interest exists on both sides.

COLLABORATIONS BEYOND ACADEMIA

Collaborations with the GLAM sector

UK

“I mean, there's something really interesting around engaging the public and audiences with these vast collections. And this goes back to this early work on generous interfaces ...”

CN

I think the impact has been more significant. We've been trying to figure out how to get the content up since 2013 when we started doing the website remodelling and then the guided tour system. I think we can apply some of the theories and methodologies of digital humanities, including some of the technologies it promotes, to the development and creation of our digital products, which can make our road more solid and effective.

The **digital humanities have historically had a strong relationship to GLAM institutions and cultural heritage more broadly**. Both academic and GLAM respondents in our study confirm the strength of these links in the UK, while recognising their different perspectives. In the case of the museum sector, interviewees recognise common interest in engagement and in how museums “interface with their audiences digitally”. More broadly, digital humanists and GLAM practitioners have a shared research focus in issues around cultural heritage infrastructure, accessibility and preserving digital collections. The increasing efforts by cultural heritage institutions to use digital technology to unlock the untapped potential in their collections through initiatives such as the Collections as data movement³⁸ have only served to increase opportunities for collaboration.

In the UK, a series of factors has contributed to an environment of **growing confidence in the use of digital technology in cross-stakeholder cultural heritage research**: the growth of technical teams within major cultural heritage institutions; the official recognition by UKRI of Independent Research Organisations (IROs) as bodies which can receive infrastructural funding;³⁹ the creation of joint PhD supervision opportunities with cultural heritage partners; and the establishment of fellowships which allow library professionals to develop research agendas.⁴⁰ In this new landscape, some GLAM professionals are more selective in who they work with (“we won’t just give data to them [...] we have our own teams that can do research”) and are increasingly keen to be seen not just as “mere service providers” but as equal research collaborators, where their partners “understand that we work with them, but we won’t work for them”.

Cultural heritage practitioners that we interviewed **recognise the value of the digital humanities, but generally do not identify themselves as digital humanists**, and some feel that DH in its current form is sometimes “a little bit too niche”. One interviewee observes that the digital humanities produce many frameworks which could be of value to cultural heritage, but that they are often not visible to museum practitioners, archivists or librarians. There are challenges in the relationship

³⁸See <https://collectionsasdata.github.io/>

³⁹See <https://www.ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/research-organisations-eligible-for-ukri-funding/>

⁴⁰See <https://www.rluk.ac.uk/prof-practice-fellowships/>

between DH and GLAM practitioners, for example, in **what constitutes innovation for each party, in how outputs affect credit and promotion** in each sector, in the balance between theory and practice, and in the technical cultures underpinning digital work in each (e.g., for GLAM institutions creating robust and scalable infrastructures takes precedence over experimentation). There are also broader challenges affecting the GLAM sector: smaller and non-IRO status cultural heritage institutions are currently at a disadvantage in funding terms, there is a need for greater funding to overcome bias in the archive, access and licensing and the need to provide more visibility for the various research active roles GLAM professionals play – all areas where the digital humanities has the potential to contribute.

GLAM institutions in China play a significant role in digital humanities. They not only provide **foundational data resources for digitization but have also established some high-profile digital humanities projects**. From a collaborative perspective, there is more cooperation between libraries and the academic world, particularly with the information technology and publishing industries. However, there is relatively less collaboration between museums and academia in digital humanities. Some scholars believe this is due to museums' conservative stance on data openness and sharing, as well as a lack of practical applications: "museum professionals talk about knowledge graphs but struggle with practical implementation". In terms of future career development, some Chinese scholars believe that digital humanities talent training should focus on providing talent for libraries and museums. While "libraries and archives lead in DH employment, museums lag behind, and this presents an opportunity to expand DH capacity and innovation within the museum sector".

Collaborations beyond academia/with commercial sector

The **relationship between DH researchers and the commercial sector is complex**, and in our interviews we concentrated on small and medium-sized businesses with a history of working with the digital humanities. While, as one respondent from this sector notes, there is some "suspicion towards commercial partners", study responses indicate that there is potential for the digital humanities to have a **stronger, deeper and more multi-layered relationship with the commercial sector**. Common sectors where people feel that there could be more collaboration include: the publishing sector ("this feels like low hanging fruit"); software companies (where DH can demonstrate its "ability to relate to how systems are built and to understand the kinds of new features which can be beneficial"); media companies (DH "should be part of discussions" in media companies based on its experience with cultural and social data); policy making institutions (looking for evidence and current trends); and any business with content or archives. One interviewee feels that **DH should "plant its flag a little bit more"** and build stronger connections with the commercial sector, through work placements, sponsorship opportunities or fellowships for people to move the other way from industry.

Our interviewees include people working in small companies who are often excited by what is happening in the digital humanities, but for whom **the current funding**

models in the UK are generally too restrictive. This is due to a number of factors: the limited funds available in some instances; weak project management culture in humanities research (although “universities are getting better at this”); the slow timelines; the low statistical likelihood of being successful in many applications; the need to make promises to improve a project’s chances stacked against the difficulty in defining outcomes before a project has started (and the need for better mechanisms for requirements analysis/closer attention to the design phase). One respondent suggests that funding schemes should consider releasing “smaller pots of money for discovery in prototype phases” and making success criteria “really transparent”. Again, there is clearly a role for the digital humanities to be more proactive in these discussions and helping to shape strategy.

The **collaboration between digital humanities and commercial companies in China primarily manifests in co-building centres and jointly conducting projects.** Some interviewees believe that projects based on commercial partnerships tend to be more effective and technologically specialized. As mentioned earlier, digital humanities scholars also provide consulting services to commercial companies or secure research funding through such collaborations. Commercial companies are also attempting to commercialise the research outcomes of digital humanities scholars. The commercialization of the CBDB project in China serves as an example. Some scholars view this positively, while others remain cautious.

GLOBAL VISIBILITY

UK

“I think it is not enough. The main thing is that we don't publish enough English articles, especially not enough influential English articles. This may be mainly a problem of teachers' writing, because it seems that most history scholars don't pay much attention to the writing of these overseas journals”.

CN

“I think it is very visible because we still have a disproportionate presence in the main DH journals and in terms of how many presentations from UK DH practitioners occur at the main DH conferences”.

Perceived visibility on the global stage

In summary, the UK DH community benefits from structural advantages like language dominance and a historical foundation in the field but still has work to do in establishing a collective identity and introducing sustained inclusivity. In contrast, the Chinese DH community faces significant external and internal barriers—from language and cultural differences to institutional fragmentation—but shows signs of growth and increasing global awareness. Both communities share a commitment to international collaboration and broader recognition, albeit from different starting points and with divergent challenges. A more inclusive global DH future, as envisioned by both groups, would benefit from greater moves towards mutual exchange, structural equity, and recognition of diverse epistemological cultures.

UK scholars generally perceive their DH community as highly visible internationally, especially in comparison to most other countries besides the US. This visibility is attributed to strong historical DH foundations in the UK, the dominance of English as the lingua franca of academia, and a long-standing active presence in major DH conferences and organizations like the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO)⁴¹ and European Association for Digital Humanities (EADH)⁴². However, some UK scholars recognise that this visibility often pertains to individual researchers rather than cohesive institutions or a national community, which limits the perception of the UK DH field as a unified entity.

In contrast, Chinese DH scholars express greater ambivalence about their global visibility. While acknowledging growing international recognition—such as increased social media visibility and participation in global DH events—most scholars believe China's presence remains limited. The dominant barriers include language differences, insufficient presence in English-language publications, and minimal representation in international DH institutions. Chinese DH is often seen as isolated within a “local area network”, highlighting the limited integration with the global academic community. Some scholars cite successful cases of international recognition as models for future engagement, though they also stress the importance of developing a uniquely Chinese DH voice rather than simply conforming to Western standards.

⁴¹See <https://adho.org/>

⁴²See <https://eadh.org/>

Despite the differences, **both UK and Chinese scholars express interest in more inclusive international DH dialogues, framed within wider calls for greater representation of non-Western perspectives** more generally.

Language and communication

Language emerges as a central structural challenge for Chinese DH scholars. Many note that the scarcity of English-language research outputs produced by Chinese scholars and the difficulty of translating nuanced Chinese scholarly concepts impede visibility and mutual understanding. There is a sense that Chinese DH scholarship is often not fully understood or valued due to linguistic and cultural gaps. In the words of one interviewee: “the main obstacle is that the two sides do not understand each other very well, and I feel that foreigners do not trust us enough”.

This issue is largely absent from the UK responses, reflecting the structural privilege of producing research in English. Our cohort speak a high number of languages (ten languages are used regularly by our interviewees), which demonstrates that there is hidden multilingual potential in UK DH, despite the overall predominance of English in communication and publications in the UK field. UK scholars acknowledge the language advantage and how it amplifies their international presence. However, and despite the multinational and multilingual backgrounds of many UK scholars, language is not generally prominent as a factor in UK debates about DH—an implicit contrast that underscores global inequalities in DH visibility tied to linguistic hegemony. However, fields studying or promoting languages and multilingualism (such as modern languages, area studies and linguistics) have historically been strong in UK DH and there has been recent work (Nilsson-Fernández, P., Spence, P. and Wells, N., 2024) to promote multilingual DH in UK and Ireland, building in part on historic DH projects to foster digital research on other languages spoken in the two countries such as Irish, Welsh, Scots and Scots Gaelic in the UK.

Some UK and Chinese DH scholars also share concerns about the marginalization of lower resourced languages within digital humanities infrastructure. Both groups highlight systemic barriers such as resource limitations, technological biases, and insufficient coordination but frame these issues within different national contexts. UK scholars focus on overcoming cultural biases embedded in English-dominated tools and policies, while Chinese scholars emphasise technical gaps (for example, around font libraries, input methods or segmentation algorithms) and regional disparities affecting low-resource languages. The predominance of English, both as a national language and as the default for technological tools, marginalizes other languages in UK DH discourse and a lack of strategic vision or resources for multilingual projects exacerbate the issue.

Chinese scholars similarly note that digital humanities infrastructure prioritizes the dominant language—in this case, Mandarin Chinese—while minority languages face substantial challenges. They describe DH infrastructure as a potential catalyst for linguistic inclusion but emphasise that it currently falls short in supporting minority languages like Tibetan, Zhuang, and Manchu. While some progress has been made in dialect research and database creation, these efforts remain small-scale and

poorly coordinated. Both UK and Chinese scholars see opportunities for improving linguistic diversity through better coordination and investment in multilingual DH infrastructure.

Several scholars are interested in the extent to which digital humanities can actually benefit lower resourced languages, such as by “promot[ing] the preservation and study of dialects, classical languages, and minority languages”, building a common platform to facilitate cross-linguistic dialogue, and questioning how the emergence of AI and large language models may improve or reduce support for other languages and variants.

COLLABORATION CHINA-UK

Context

One of the main objectives of this report is to identify opportunities for greater collaboration between digital humanities researchers in UK and China. In the final section, we asked participants to what extent they have collaborated with DH researchers in the 'other' country, to what extent they are aware of such collaborations in general, and what they perceive are the main opportunities for UK-Chinese collaboration in future.

As we have seen, due to structural issues in the field (and in academia as a whole), Chinese researchers are often more aware of Western scholarship than vice versa. For example, one UK respondent who is editor-in-chief for a major journal notes that despite the fact that a third of all their journal submissions came from China-based researchers, they feel disconnected from China's culture of knowledge production due to a lack of opportunities for researchers in both countries to interact, collaborate and learn from each other. There has not been the same kind of "calibration of topics and areas of interest" that has occurred at European level, for example through DARIAH and CLARIN collaborations, and nor has there been serious evaluation of the differing research priorities, or exploration of inter-cultural epistemic challenges.

UK scholars describe collaboration with mainland China as limited, often occurring at the individual level rather than through formal institutional frameworks. Some partnerships are initiated through Chinese students studying in the UK, who later return to China and maintain informal research links. While UK scholars recognise the potential for collaboration, they note that other Asian regions, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, have been more active in engaging with UK institutions. In contrast, Chinese scholars emphasise that collaboration is hindered by limited communication and mutual understanding between the two sides. Both groups acknowledge that collaboration is still in its infancy, but that there is considerable potential for growth.

Challenges

Language barriers

Language barriers are a significant challenge for both sides. In the UK, very few DH researchers have the level of proficiency in the Chinese language to communicate effectively at the level required to undertake serious research and UK scholars note that most collaborations currently rely on Chinese researchers' proficiency in English. In addition to this, there is still relatively little translation of Chinese digital humanities research into English.

One of the important events in the development of digital humanities in China is the

translation of English-language digital humanities books or textbooks into Chinese. However, moving in the opposite direction, few Chinese digital humanities works have been translated into English or published in English, which hinders their broader influence. Some interviewees suggest that a dedicated Chinese DH organization focused on translating Chinese DH research into English could significantly improve visibility: “If there is an organization dedicated to translating various Chinese digital humanities achievements to the West, I think this may be a faster way”.

Machine translation tools have bridged some of the gap, at least to allow for superficial summaries of text in the other language, but they do not address cultural, or indeed all linguistic, challenges and they are not likely to do so anytime soon. In particular, the kind of cross-linguistic research and analysis we have envisioned here (sometimes involving a comparative translational approach) requires very high levels of linguistic and cultural understanding in both/all languages, even for (or perhaps especially for) data driven work.

Political concerns

Political and administrative issues are also mentioned – here different national and institutional mandates affecting travel, freedom of information, open access, privacy or the sharing of potentially sensitive data are seen as potential obstacles. The political context is also seen to limit some of the contemporary topics which can be approached and brought concerns that political interference might distort the course of research or its outcomes. Both groups recognise political challenges but frame them differently: UK scholars focus on ethical concerns and restrictions on digital ecosystems, while Chinese scholars emphasise policy-driven limitations.

Funding

Both groups agree that the lack of opportunities for transnational funding is a critical barrier. UK scholars highlight the lack of seed funding or institutional incentives to support collaborative projects with China. In contrast, Chinese scholars emphasise logistical challenges related to limited financial resources for international collaborations or academic exchanges.

Cultural differences

Cultural differences are seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. UK scholars note that understanding China’s unique perspectives could enrich DH research but acknowledge difficulties in aligning priorities due to differing academic cultural norms. Chinese scholars frame cultural differences more positively as opportunities for mutual learning but recognise that introverted communication styles within China may hinder proactive engagement with international partners.

Digital ecosystems and access

Differences in digital ecosystems further complicate collaboration. UK scholars point out that platforms commonly used in the West are blocked in China, creating barriers for communication and research dissemination. Chinese scholars emphasise data security concerns and restrictive policies limiting cross-national cooperation. One UK interviewee observes that researchers experience access to different resources, depending on their locale: “**we talk about the digital world, but it’s digital worlds [plural] - we don’t all have access to the same infrastructure and data**”. On a related note, one very major challenge is the presence of “different foundational or legal systems relating to data and to sharing data”.

Opportunities

The existence of significant numbers of Chinese Master’s and PhD students on DH programmes in the UK, provide an excellent, and under-used, opportunity to explore wider collaborations between China and the UK, in both directions, and in both teaching and research.

Access to tech

In the technological space, incentives for collaboration reported in our study include the fact that both countries boast high levels of digital literacy and high rates of technological development, although not always in the same areas (which is an opportunity), and a strong interest in the growing areas of computational humanities and AI-related DH.

Cultural heritage/shared histories

UK interviewees identify **significant opportunities for collaboration in projects around cultural heritage project or shared histories**. Some propose initiatives to create new visitor experiences using digital tools and democratise access to cultural data, particularly given the UK’s extensive collections of Chinese historical artifacts. They see potential in comparative research on historical events (e.g., the Opium Wars) or audience behaviour across cultural contexts. One UK GLAM respondent sees cultural differences in engagement with GLAM as an example of the kind of fruitful comparisons which could be made: “what would be really intriguing is [to see] if they had a really different perspective on what engaging audiences with heritage looked like and what was important to pull out of cultural heritage assets”. China’s rapid technological development is also viewed as an area for knowledge exchange, particularly in AI and digital tools.

Chinese scholars similarly highlight the potential for knowledge exchange, noting that UK institutions have valuable expertise, standards, and mature research teams that can guide collaborative efforts. They **view DH as a bridge for cultural and academic exchange, enabling unified data-driven research on East Asian culture.** Digital methods are seen as a way to reduce traditional barriers and improve cross-cultural understanding.

Both groups recognise cultural heritage and technological innovation as key areas for collaboration. However, while UK scholars emphasise leveraging their collections and expertise for joint projects, Chinese scholars focus on using DH to unify regional research efforts and learn from UK methodologies.

Value of networking opportunities

Interviewees from both countries argue that an important condition for greater future co-operation will be **establishing more agile networks where people in different settings such as China and the UK can come together to discuss research in a manner which does not privilege one culture of knowledge production or the other**, and more than one person recommended creating university schemes to support the development of such connections and networks.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

In this report, we have produced a snapshot of how digital humanities stakeholders in China and the UK view themselves, their field, and each other. We do not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of each research community, but rather to identify areas of similarity and difference. In so doing, we have attempted to outline the incentives and barriers for stronger collaboration between the two countries in future.

We do not aim to provide definitive recommendations and would instead propose more targeted collaboration exercises in future. We do, however, offer here below some potential action points or areas of focus, based on our own interpretation of the responses to our study:

General

- Encourage university-GLAM-industry collaboration opportunities around digital transformations in culture and the humanities.
- Lobby funders and professional organisations for support for seed funding for exploratory networking programmes around specific research topics, which might include non-academic partners.
- Given the fact that respondents identify a lack of opportunities to interact with people from the other country, arrange open ideation/hackathon events around common historical or cultural events, e.g. in the case of UK/China, the Opium Wars, with invited participants from other humanities disciplines, GLAM sector and policy organisations.

For Researchers

- One interviewee argues for greater “calibration of topics and areas of interest” to bring this close to that which occurs at European level. Open showcase of DH research in virtual workshops between institutions in both countries to provide short research snapshots in each location, followed by brainstorming of possible research collaborations. This could potentially include invited speakers from cultural heritage, funding and policy organisations.
- Produce dual-lingual case studies demonstrating major DH innovation contributions for wider dissemination.
- Propose special issues in publications around topics which will facilitate collaboration between researchers in both countries.
- Create joint bibliographies, glossaries and taxonomies to demonstrate potential connections and to bridge conceptual differences.
- Co-organise joint events, workshops or conferences with bilingual sessions and collaborative themes.

For GLAM institutions

- Build bilingual interactive interfaces and storytelling experiences around areas of common interest.
- Co-curate virtual exhibitions and datasets that incorporate elements of UK and Chinese cultural heritage.
- Develop shared metadata and ontological frameworks to foster cross-border interoperability.
- Design interactive competitions to stimulate the innovative use and comparison of GLAM data in both countries.
- Facilitate bilateral residencies or internships for GLAM professionals to explore digital innovation and collaboration opportunities.

For Funders

- Establish a bilateral UK-China DH programme designed initially to identify and promote small scale networking opportunities and research collaborations involving digital humanities researchers and GLAM institutions.
- Create smaller seed grants (e.g. £5,000–£15,000) for early-stage collaboration or pilot projects
- Incentivise open access and open data initiatives.
- Explore mechanisms for facilitating multilingual research opportunities encompassing all the languages spoken in the two countries.
- In the longer term, support research infrastructure development which is sustainable and interoperable across both countries.
- Support training and exchange fellowships for early-career DH researchers and practitioners.

For University administrators

- Joint Graduate Degree Programs. Universities in China and the UK that have already established Digital Humanities Master's programs may consider developing joint graduate degree programs in Digital Humanities, in order to promote collaborative training of Master's and doctoral students.
- Create joint summer schools involving bilateral and multilingual training in collaboration with GLAM partners.
- Develop cross-border mentorship programmes to support Early Career Researchers in DH.

For Teachers and programme convenors:

- Inter-country curriculum comparison to identify similarities and differences in topics covered, or methodologies used. How can international virtual exchange be effectively facilitated across DH programmes in different countries, on macro or micro levels?
- The international classroom. Masters' programmes in the UK have a high proportion of international students, and yet this is largely an untapped resource in the classroom – we propose that steps be taken to more proactively recognise this and give these voices more agency in curriculum design.
- Using both machine translation and in-cohort expertise (e.g. the high number of Chinese students in UK DH programmes at Masters' level), conduct literature review comparison across programmes in both countries, exploring the different treatment of specific DH methods or topics.

APPENDICES

Journals mentioned by interviewees

UK respondents

- Digital Scholarship in the Humanities <https://academic.oup.com/dsh>
- Digital Humanities Quarterly <https://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/>
- Journal of Open Data in the Humanities <https://openhumanitiesdata.metajnl.com/>
- Programming Historian <https://programminghistorian.org/>
- European Journal of Digital Humanities <https://eupublishing.com/loi/ijhac>

Chinese respondents

- International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing: <https://www.eupublishing.com/journal/ijhac>
- Digital Humanities (《数字人文》) <https://www.zhongwen.tsinghua.edu.cn/ky/szrwjbj.htm>
- Digital Humanities Research (《数字人文研究》) <http://dh.ruc.edu.cn/xsqk/index.htm>
- Digital Archive and Digital Humanities (Taiwan 《数位典藏与数位人文》) <https://tadh.org.tw/en/jodadh/>
- Journal of Shandong University (《山东大学学报》) <https://www.journal.sdu.edu.cn/>

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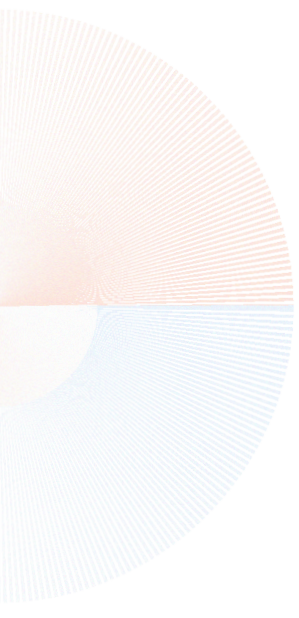
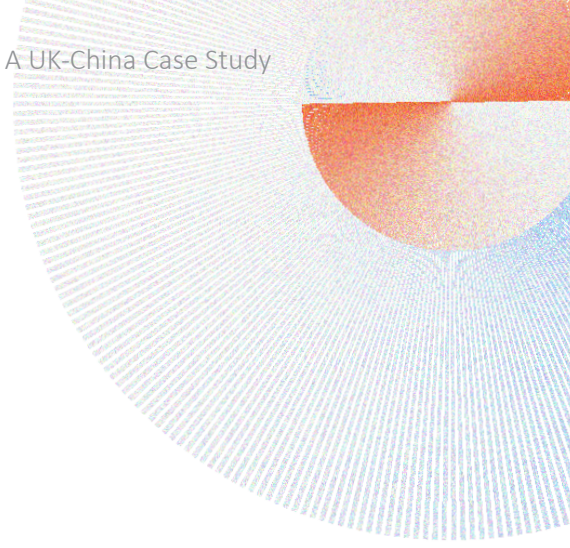
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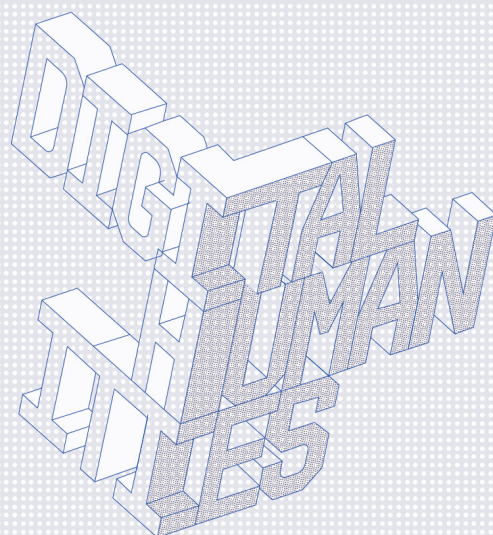
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中-英案例研究

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