

**Review of**  
***A Hybrid Approach to Teaching Chinese Through Digital Humanities, CALL, and Project-Based Learning***  
**(《A Hybrid Approach to Teaching Chinese Through Digital Humanities, CALL, and Project-Based Learning》书评)**

Kalyanov, Artem  
Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center  
(artem.kalyanov@dliflc.edu)

Chen, D. (2024). *A hybrid approach to teaching Chinese through digital humanities, CALL, and project-based learning*. Routledge. ISBN: 978-1-03-227275-7.

This review examines *A Hybrid Approach to Teaching Chinese through Digital Humanities, CALL, and Project-Based Learning* by Dongdong Chen. The book presents an innovative pedagogical framework called DATEPBLL, integrating Digital Humanities (DH), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL) to enhance teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL). Chen provides theoretical insights and practical applications, demonstrating the synergies of these methodologies through case studies and best practices.

## 1. Overview of the Book and Chapter Summaries

The book is systematically organized into seven chapters, each delving into a crucial component of the DATEPBLL framework. Chen meticulously explores the theoretical underpinnings of CALL, DH, and PBLL, their historical evolution, and their individual and combined potential for enhancing TCFL. Through case studies such as game development, podcast creation, and e-portfolio projects, the author demonstrates the practical applications of the framework, making the book a rich resource for educators and curriculum designers. Additionally, some specific best strategies for teaching Chinese in K-16 settings, highlighted in the book, provide further support for the proposed new approach.

**In Chapter 1**, the book's introduction, Chen (2024) provides an overview of the topics, i.e., CALL, DH, and PBLL, the first two originating from computing technology. The author outlines learning theory and theoretical accounts of second language acquisition, with a detailed description of the characteristics of learners and instructors in the digital age, and teaching pedagogy. All these pave the way for further exploration of CALL and DH in the context of teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL). In doing

so, the author establishes the rationale behind integrating CALL, DH, and PBL in TCFL and introduces the DATEPBL approach.

**Chapter 2, *Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*** explores its evolution, benefits, and challenges, with a focus on its role in enhancing language instruction. Drawing on the findings of Kalyanov (2024), the research emphasizes that CALL plays a transformative role in language education. The study highlights that the effective development of CALL software requires the integration of the four language competencies—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—while also addressing the needs and compatibility of both learners and educators. This ensures that the tools not only meet the individual needs of learners but also align with teaching methodologies. For Russian language educators, such as Kalyanov (2024), CALL offers a unique opportunity to bridge traditional and innovative teaching methods, fostering engaging and interactive environments that enhance language acquisition, which Chen (2024) also highlights in Chapter 2. Both Chen (2024) and Kalyanov (2024), as active CALL researchers and foreign language educators, believe that by tailoring software to these competencies and fits, CALL is a powerful complement to conventional instruction, reinforcing fluency and comprehension in diverse learning settings.

**Chapter 3, *Digital Humanities (DH)***, delves into DH's pedagogical potential and historical development, emphasizing the **transformative impact** of Digital Pedagogy on teaching and research in the humanities. As Davis et al. (2020) argue, this impact is grounded in six key concepts that redefine learning in digital pedagogy. First, **openness** fosters transparency of practice, dismantles boundaries, and encourages sharing content, tools, and ideas, enabling a more inclusive and accessible educational environment. Second, **collaboration** reimagines the learning process as a communal effort, with students working together on joint projects that promote teamwork and collective problem-solving. Third, **play** invites experimentation and creativity, encouraging students to try new approaches without fear of failure. Fourth, **practice** emphasizes applied learning through assignments, creation, and making, bridging theory and action in meaningful ways. Fifth, **agency** empowers students to take ownership of their learning, fostering a sense of control and efficacy as they apply their skills in diverse contexts. Lastly, **identity** highlights the role of digital environments in allowing students to explore and express their individuality, supporting their self-development, and preserving their personal and cultural identities. Together, these principles underscore the transformative potential of DH in reshaping educational experiences and equipping learners with skills essential for the 21st century.

**Chapter 4, *Project-Based Language Learning (PBL)***, details the transition from traditional Project-Based Learning to PBL and underscores its relevance for modern language education. The chapter proposes integrating CALL and DH through PBL to form the DATEPBL model (Digital Humanities–Augmented Technology–Enhanced Project-Based Language Learning). This innovative language-teaching approach, suggested by Chen (2024), combines technology, digital humanities tools, and project-based learning to create an interactive and engaging language-learning experience. Students use technology, such as apps and software, alongside digital tools like archives or databases with innovative pedagogy lent by DH to work on meaningful, real-world projects.

These projects not only help learners improve their language skills but also foster cultural understanding, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. By integrating DH, CALL, and PBL, DATEPBL offers a hands-on approach to language education, making it both practical and innovative. For example, students might create a podcast, design a game to teach vocabulary, or develop an online portfolio showcasing their progress. As a language educator and CALL researcher, I firmly believe this approach is highly effective for teaching Chinese, Russian, or any other foreign language. It seamlessly integrates technology, cultural exploration, and active learning, equipping students with the skills needed for both linguistic proficiency and real-world success.

**Chapter 5, *Case Studies***, showcases practical applications of the DATEPBL approach through projects like game development, podcast creation, and e-portfolios, all aligned with the project framework. Chen (2024) offers a thorough rationale for each project, outlining their design, planning, and execution to enhance student learning effectively. The chapter's clear structure and detailed guidance make it easy for language educators to adapt these innovative, student-centered projects to other language programs, promoting impactful and engaging instruction.

**In Chapter 6, *Best Practices***, Chen (2024) highlights innovative PBL strategies for teaching Chinese in both K-12 and university settings. For K-12 classrooms, the author emphasizes the importance of real-world applications to make language learning relevant and engaging. Collaborative work is encouraged to build both language and social skills, while creative projects like calligraphy using unconventional materials inspire creativity alongside language practice.

In university contexts, Chen (2024) focuses on integrating cultural elements and technology to deepen learning. Music and culture-focused activities allow students to explore traditional and modern Chinese culture, enriching their understanding of the language. The third project on website development integrates digital skills with language learning by engaging students in applying their classroom knowledge to create a website designed for prospective university students. This approach combines linguistic and digital competencies, fostering the development of both skill sets through the creation of a functional and resourceful platform.

Chen (2024) concludes with general recommendations for effective PBL implementation. Key strategies include scaffolded support to guide students toward autonomy, the integration of technology to enhance linguistic and cultural learning, and an interdisciplinary approach to address diverse learner needs. Projects should be outcome-oriented, aligning with clear objectives such as linguistic competency, cultural awareness, and the development of 21st-century skills. The adaptability of PBL makes it a versatile method for advancing Chinese language education across educational levels.

**Chapter 7, *Future Directions***, examines emerging technologies like generative AI and their implications for the DATEPBL approach, offering recommendations for future applications. As an active CALL researcher, based on the findings of my study on CALL (Kalyanov, 2024), it is crucial to have a model like DATEPBL, where technology

integrates with pedagogy to enhance PBL. This is especially important in the times of AI and rapidly evolving generative AI technologies. However, no matter how sophisticated these technologies grow, pedagogy remains the cornerstone of effective learning.

## 2. Innovation and Applications

Chen's work is particularly commendable for its practical focus and innovative blend of technology, pedagogy, and collaborative learning. The DATEPBL approach redefines traditional language learning by infusing it with cutting-edge digital tools and project-based frameworks. Unlike conventional methods that prioritize rote memorization and isolated skill drills, DATEPBL emphasizes meaningful, contextualized learning experiences where students actively engage with language authentically and purposefully through student-centered, project-based language learning activities. Chen (2024) exemplifies this model through detailed case studies demonstrating how CALL and DH can complement PBL to create immersive and multifaceted learning experiences.

One of the most striking innovations is the **gaming project**, which illustrates how digital tools can transform rote memorization into dynamic and interactive gameplay. Students are guided to design and implement educational games that reinforce language concepts such as vocabulary and grammar. Students are guided to design and implement educational games that reinforce language learning by building an association between two linguistic components. Like learning any language, when learning Chinese, students must establish a one-to-one association between the pronunciation of a syllable with a correct tone, between a sound with its corresponding meaning, and between a word with its visual image. What is noteworthy is the fact that the end product of this gaming project remains available online and serves the purpose of teaching and learning materials. Additionally, by participating in this creative process, learners not only enhance their language skills but also develop problem-solving abilities, teamwork, and digital literacy.

The **podcast project**, another notable example, emphasizes integrating technology with real-world communication skills. Students create podcasts on culturally rich topics, requiring them to conduct research, script content, and present their work in the target language. This project fosters authentic language use, critical thinking, and an appreciation of Chinese culture. The outcome is a learning experience that is both engaging and deeply rooted in cultural understanding. Based on my teaching experience, this podcast project can be applied to learners of different languages and different proficiency levels in various formats.

The **e-portfolio project**, aimed at preservice teachers, showcases the utility of DH and CALL in professional development. Through the creation of e-portfolios, these future educators document their learning journeys, reflect on their teaching philosophies, and curate resources to use in their careers. This project not only prepares them for practical challenges in the classroom but also equips them with digital competencies essential for modern teaching.

Furthermore, Chen extends the discussion beyond individual classroom practices to address best practices adopted by other Chinese language educators. Examples include collaborative projects such as calligraphy using unconventional materials, student-created websites to explore linguistic topics, and music-infused cultural activities. These innovative applications demonstrate the versatility of the DATEPBL model and its potential for adaptation across diverse educational settings.

Chen also underscores the potential of emerging technologies, such as generative AI, to enhance the DATEPBL approach further. By incorporating AI-driven tools, instructors can personalize learning experiences, generate adaptive content, and provide immediate feedback, making language education more accessible and efficient.

In summary, the innovations and applications presented in this volume highlight Chen's dedication to marrying theory with practice. The DATEPBL approach goes beyond merely integrating technology and pedagogy; it transforms it into a medium through which students are actively making things by constructing knowledge, collaborating meaningfully, and developing skills beyond the classroom. This ensures that the book is not only a theoretical guide but also a practical resource for educators striving to modernize their teaching methodologies.

### **3. Contributions and Limitations**

The book stands out for its innovative interdisciplinary approach, which bridges the gap between language pedagogy and digital innovation. Notably, it introduces the DATEPBL model, which calls for integrating three currently separate disciplines—Digital Humanities, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and Project-Based Learning—into a cohesive framework. This model represents a significant contribution to the field by addressing foreign language standards, promoting 21st-century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and digital literacy, and accommodating the unique needs of the current generation of students. By synergizing these domains, Chen (2024) not only advances the theoretical frameworks of CALL, DH, and PBL but also enriches them with empirical evidence, actionable insights, and practical applications tailored for modern learners.

As a limitation, although the book targets a broad audience, readers who are not familiar with the specialized terminologies of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Digital Humanities (DH), and Project-Based Language Learning (PBL) may find the theoretical sections somewhat challenging. Additionally, while the DATEPBL framework is thoughtfully developed, the book could benefit from a deeper exploration of its scalability and adaptability to non-Chinese language contexts. For language educators who are less experienced with PBL, providing explicit guidance on tailoring the showcased projects to their specific teaching contexts would further enhance their practical value and accessibility.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

In *A Hybrid Approach to Teaching Chinese through Digital Humanities, CALL, and Project-Based Learning*, Chen (2024) presents a groundbreaking resource for educators and researchers in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL). The book compellingly illustrates how the integration of DH, CALL, and PBL can elevate both linguistic and cultural competence. While its primary focus is on TCFL, the DATEPBL framework offers transformative insights that extend to diverse educational contexts.

In an era increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence (AI), language educators must rethink traditional teaching paradigms, redefine classroom dynamics, and adapt to the evolving needs of tech-savvy students. By exploring the synergies between DH, CALL, PBL, and emerging AI applications, Chen (2024) encourages educators to embrace innovative methodologies that prepare students for the challenges of a digital and interconnected world. Essential for educators, curriculum designers, and graduate students, this book also serves as a vital resource for administrators and policymakers aiming to harness technology's potential to reshape education.

**Disclaimer:** 1) This article has been approved for public release by the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center's Public Affairs Office. For verification, please email: mpao@dliflc.edu. 2) Contents of this article are not necessarily the official views of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, nor are they endorsed by the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. 3) All third-party materials referenced in the article remain the intellectual property of their respective authors. Use of outside materials is done under the fair use copyright principle, for educational purposes only. 4) The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the author.

#### References

- Chen, D. (2024). *A hybrid approach to teaching Chinese through digital humanities, CALL, and project-based learning*. Routledge.
- Davis, R. F., Gold, M. K., Harris, K. D. and Sayers, J. (2020). *Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: concepts, models, and experiments*, MLA Commons, Modern Language Association.
- Kalyanov, A. (2024). Software developers' experiences with CALL in the context of the four language competencies (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and teacher and learner fit: A qualitative descriptive Study. *Dissertations*. 552. [https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd\\_dissertations/552](https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd_dissertations/552)