

## Using Social Media to Promote International Collaboration

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This paper explores the use of social media or Web 2.0 services for an international collaborative project.<sup>2</sup> Participants in this collaboration used free and inexpensive social media tools to communicate and work together. This case study presents a model for using inexpensive social media tools to forge new partnerships among academic libraries. Academic libraries can now tap the expertise of fellow librarians in other countries and explore new cultures to improve and extend their services without the huge financial cost once attributed to international collaboration.

### The Possibilities of Social Media to Promote International Collaboration

When considering the global scope of higher education in the 21st century, can the path opened by social media for professional collaboration among international academic libraries be ignored? This article discusses a unique collaboration between two academic librarians, one in southeastern Pennsylvania, United States of America (USA), and the other in Shandong Province in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The article relates how international collaborations may occur through the use of social media, the difficulties faced by such collaborations, and the necessity and benefits of working with international colleagues. This article addresses the issues in forming international collaborations, taking into consideration distance, technological differences, language, culture, and the role that computer-mediated communication through social media tools can play in overcoming these obstacles.

## Literature Review

Abbasi, Hossian, Uddin, and Rasmussen (2011) noted three levels of collaboration that exist among scientific researchers. First, there are macro-level collaborations involving large initiatives by collaborating nations or large international organizations. Then there are meso-level collaborations; usually these involve collaborations among individual institutions, such as universities working across national boundaries. Lastly, there are micro-level collaborations, which involve single researchers or small groups of individuals working together.

### Macro-Level Collaborations

The idea of international collaboration among librarians is not new. Johnson (2009) cites Urquhaut, who in 1987 commented that “national boundaries” are “handicaps” to be overcome (p. 178). It may have appeared at that time that collaboration on a global scale would be difficult. Yet from that time to the present, large-scale efforts have successfully reached across borders. However, these collaborations usually occurred where national borders met, such as within the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

Langeland (2006) discusses one instance of this type of international collaboration, the Nordic Literature and Library Committee (NORDBOK). Led by the Nordic Council of Denmark, Norway’s and Sweden’s public libraries and corporations worked together to promote Nordic culture through a variety of enterprises. NORDBOK selected and, in collaboration with the participants, translated various written and oral materials that were previously unavailable. The sharing of cultural materials extended beyond the Nordic nations as translations were provided for other peoples in their native tongues. As an international collaboration, NORDBOK was an unparalleled success.

Johnson (2009) describes another European effort, the Tempus Programme, which has helped provide educational opportunities for nations seeking to improve their academic and public education programs. Organizations from Eastern Europe partnered with universities in the European Union for a three-year joint project developing new master’s programs in library and information science (MLS). Most courses were taught online. The project brought librarians from across Europe to assist in the education of new professionals in information sciences.

Macro-collaborations involve large numbers of library staff and require large amounts of money to fund the projects. Perhaps the most successful of the macro-collaborations is the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) headquartered in Dublin, Ohio, USA. Beginning as the Ohio College Library Center, a meso-level cooperative effort among academic libraries in the state of Ohio, OCLC is a centralized shared online catalog. OCLC (2013) claims to have a global membership in excess of 25,000 member institutions. Librarians who contribute to OCLC’s WorldCat, the largest online catalog in the world, also work jointly to develop standards for the sharing of bibliographic information through various committees and structures under the OCLC framework. It is a prime example of how a smaller localized collaboration can grow into an international cooperative.

The growth of the Internet and the ease of professional networking that accompanied its expansion helped to make the individual members of OCLC stronger. Thousands of researchers and catalogers have gained greatly from this macro-level effort to build WorldCat.

### Meso-Level Collaborations

“International partnerships are becoming prevalent in tertiary education. These agreements and memorandums of understanding are often done at the higher administrative levels filling the gaps in program offerings, and increasing enrolment in both institutions” (Alleyne & Rodrigues, 2011, p.261). An instance of a meso-level international collaboration occurred between Mount Saint Vincent University and Bermuda College. The two institutions shared

. . . articulation agreements that allow students to begin programs in business administration, applied arts (child studies), and teacher certification at Bermuda College in Hamilton, Bermuda, and complete their course of study at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada (Alleyne & Rodrigues, 2011, p. 262).

A natural outcome of this partnership was the joint project between the institutions' libraries. Using "conferencing software that allowed for voice, instant messaging chat, and live Web demonstration" for communication, they developed programs to "introduce students to the concepts of information literacy and reinforce for the students that they were able to access librarians and library services at both institutions" (Alleyne & Rodrigues, 2011, p. 262). The collaboration was built upon the agreements entered into by the parent institutions.

International meso-collaborations among institutional libraries have gained interest among foundations offering support to academic institutions. One effort between the University of Tennessee Libraries (UTL) in the United States and the Makerere University Libraries (MUL) in Ghana was funded by "the Carnegie Corporation of New York's International Development Program (IDP)" (Atkins, Smith, & Dewey, 2005, p. 192). Additional funds came from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The partnership initiated by MUL was to advance their library system within a university-wide initiative to improve the quality of services offered to its community. The collaboration helped MUL develop a plan to upgrade its overall services. According to Atkins et al. (2005), there are plans to build an ongoing relationship between the two institutions, including an exchange program between UT's School of Information Science and MU's East African School of Library and Information Sciences.

Institutional efforts, such as those mentioned here, provide librarians with the funding and personnel to make international collaborations successful. Meso-collaborations may use a wide variety of technologies, including social media, to connect and enhance the learning experience.

### Micro-Level Collaborations

With micro-collaborations, a whole new model of interaction is brought into focus. This type of collaboration, according to Gazan (2010), is defined as "brief, informal expressions of mutual interest and mutual effort toward seeking information on a given topic" (p. 693). Studies of transactions conducted in Naver's Knowledge-In (South Korea), Answerbag, and Yahoo Answers have shown that the ability to transact meaningful collaborations in online social Q&A communities has much to do with the social capital a participant has accrued within a community. "High-status" individuals will draw attention in any environment and more easily make the connections for successful collaboration. Gazan (2010) postulated a social site different from that of the traditional question-and-answer (Q&A) site, one that would allow participants to follow questions by joining the conversation. This would be a "collaborative workspace" where individuals would see lists of participants and trace the histories of conversations. This new service would generate "forms of site-specific social capital" by "tracking a user's collaborative activity, along with their individual efforts" (p. 701).

What Gazan (2010) described is a social media site using Web 2.0 applications. Such applications allow users to work collaboratively, share information, and interact with each other in non-structured ways. Web 2.0 applications are designed to promote social exchange among users. Examples of Web 2.0 applications are found within social media sites like MySpace, Twitter, and Facebook, among others. "Today, everything is about social media. Some industry gurus claim that if you do not participate in Facebook, YouTube, and Second Life, you are not part of cyberspace anymore" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 67).

An instance of the Q&A style of micro-collaborations among librarians is Heather Negley's HelpALibrarian site ([www.helpalibrarian.com](http://www.helpalibrarian.com)). The site allows librarians from around the globe to help each other "answer

questions, share resources and knowledge, and enhance cultural understanding” (Negley, 2012). The service allows librarians to connect anonymously in a simple, easy-to-use, question-and-answer interface. “Since its inception, HelpALibrarian has connected librarians from Massachusetts to Portugal, Malta to Egypt, Manila to Athens, and more” (Negley, 2012).

A prime example of Gazan’s “collaborative workspace” may be found on the Facebook group page, *Library Related People*. According to Aaron Tay (2012), creator of the group,

Librarians today are a fortunate bunch; we trade ideas and advice from librarians thousands of miles away as easily as from someone in the same city using the Internet and social media. As a result, new and good ideas flow very quickly these days. All it takes is one Librarian to tweet or post on a mailing list, say a script he came up with that allows you to customize Summon, and within days, libraries around the world would have copied this innovation (2012, para. 1).

Tay pioneered a means for librarians to engage in micro-collaborations on a worldwide basis using social media. Currently the group has over 1,200 members representing libraries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Much of the popularity of *Library Related People* stems from Tay’s own social capital. He is a well-known author, speaker, and blogger. His *Musings about Librarianship* blog ([musingsaboutlibrarianship.blogspot.com](http://musingsaboutlibrarianship.blogspot.com)) is well regarded in the academic library community. It was likely one of the many factors that led to his being named a *Library Journal* “Mover and Shaker” in 2011.

Arising from *Library Related People* was an experiment in the use of social media for higher education. This stretched the definition of micro-collaboration into a new realm, that of international mentoring. Dr. Myungdae Cho, then lecturing at Sung Kyun Kwan University in Seoul, Republic of Korea, wanted to demonstrate to students in his Information Sociology course the power of social media. In the summer of 2010, he called on his Facebook-using friends, including select members of the *Library Related People* group, to provide mentoring services for his students. The mentors, all successful professionals in the information services field, were to interact with the students, addressing topics assigned by Dr. Cho. Members of this mentoring group were from all parts of the globe. They would provide 24-hour support and reference. According to Reed (2011), students could access the mentors’ expertise for both academic and social interaction.

During the course that spanned the 2010-2011 academic year, the students and their mentors experienced the potential of social media for both short-term exchanges and long-term commitments to a project. For the students who wanted or needed to talk to a mentor, one was usually available throughout the day. Late night, Korea time, chat sessions were easy enough for mentors living on the East Coast of the United States. It was not unusual for the mentors in the USA to be online discussing class-related topics during lunch, while the students in Seoul were up studying into the early morning hours.

## Developing the Chinese History and Culture LibGuide: A Case Study

Potential collaborations among the mentors of Dr. Cho’s Information Sociology group were discussed, but finding common ground among the mentors was difficult. The group was diverse both geographically and professionally. While the participants were willing, finding the proper way to collaborate was problematic. However, two of the mentors, Mark Puterbaugh of Eastern University Libraries in St. Davids, Pennsylvania, USA, and Hua Sun of Shandong University of the Arts in Jinan, Shandong Province, People’s Republic of China (PRC), continued their discussions until a project was born: *The Chinese History and Culture LibGuide* ([libguides.eastern.edu/china](http://libguides.eastern.edu/china)) (see Figure 1). Plans began between Sun and Puterbaugh during the summer of 2011.

Due to their experience with Dr. Cho, working together seemed natural. By the end of fall 2011, implementation of the project had begun.

Sun and Puterbaugh sought to develop something substantial, an informational tool that would be used by faculty and students at both institutions. Puterbaugh first proposed a website dedicated to Chinese art. Sun was grateful for the suggestion of a topic so very familiar to her. She countered with a proposal to develop something with more breadth. Looking through Eastern University's online resources, Sun suggested creating a LibGuide. This would become a tool for Eastern University's community and allow Sun's school to experience a new service. Librarians at Shandong had no experience with this cloud-based content management system.

LibGuides is a mainstay tool for many libraries. The service has social media components that allow content to be built in a collaborative manner. With the aid of Eastern University's LibGuides' administrator, Andrea Reed, a site was established within Eastern's platform. Reed joined Sun and Puterbaugh for the Skype sessions to ease the participants into working with the LibGuides' collaborative tools.

Agreeing on a project was an important first step. The layout of the LibGuide would be the next step. Sun, due to her expertise with the subject matter, took the lead. Tabs were created for History, Chinese Philosophy, Art, Dance, Music, Language, Literature, Traditional Medicine, and Food. Sun added important information regarding books and audio and visual media that she felt were of high importance. She also included a link to an important database that she had helped bring online, *The Folk Paper-Cut Picture Library*.

As the work progressed through the winter of 2012 to the point of having a viable product, the directors from the two libraries exchanged letters authorizing Sun and Puterbaugh to set aside work hours for the project. Additionally, the agreement allowed for the collaborators to act as contacts for faculty and students at both institutions interested in utilizing the LibGuide. With the exchange of letters, the library directors sanctioned the project that had started as a personal exploration.

## Benefits of Collaboration

Sun and Puterbaugh believed that an international collaboration, whose participants viewed their project from different perspectives, would create a richer reference tool. In this belief, they followed Abramo, D'Angelo, and Solazzi (2011), who wrote that international collaborations offer greater results due to the "heterogeneity of resources (both intellectual and other)" (p. 205). The dissimilarities in language, culture, and general outlook provide a richer work relationship. It seemed reasonable to assume that in international collaborations, precisely because of the differences between partners, the expected results would be more meaningful. Sun and Puterbaugh agree with De Dreu and West (2001) whose studies of group creativity confirmed that it is diversity rather than conformity that leads to more innovative and higher quality results.

The participants wanted to demonstrate the benefits of pursuing international collaboration using social media. Sun and Puterbaugh expected that the use of social media would lower the transaction costs for international collaboration. They asked themselves if the tools offered by social media could be implemented successfully enough to overcome the barriers of long distance travel and eliminate the need for face-to-face meetings that would typically be necessary for such a project. Would these free-to-use and low-cost tools prove adequate for the two participants to create a meaningful product at the end of the collaborative transaction? This was a challenge noted by Landry & Amara (1998) who observed that international collaborations involve greater transaction costs: negotiating and mediating the objectives, choosing methodologies, dealing with results, managing logistics for communications, and managing gatherings and face-to-face meetings. They concluded that successful international collaborations called for a greater commitment of resources than domestic collaborations.

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A Micro Collaboration work in progress.


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#### Your Subject Guide (China)



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#### Purpose

### China Literacy


#### Purpose of this Site

This site is the first of its kind effort for Warner Memorial Library. It is an international collaboration that will bring together information from a variety of resources to the researcher in the history and culture of China. Chinese civilization was one of the earliest. It's 5000 plus year of history makes it one of the great influencers of global history. Today China stands on the brink of being the dominant player on the world scene. It is important for students in many disciplines to understand how to access resources on Chinese culture. This site is here to help students begin their research. It will act as a guide to assist their journey into this vast and rich topic.

We are very grateful for the assistance of librarian Hua Sun from Shandong University of Arts as we develop this LibGuide.

[Comments \(0\)](#)

#### Your Subject Guide (USA)



**Mark Puterbaugh**

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**Shandong University of Arts Library**

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#### Welcome to this guide

Welcome to the China:History and Culture guide. This guide acts as a starting point for your research on Chinese history and culture. Consult it to learn where to find books, articles, journals, databases, and other information resources.

If you need help with your research you can contact Mark Puterbaugh or me, Hua Sun. We are happy to help.

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#### Subjects to Search

Great Wall of China (China) – History – Pictorial works.

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Figure 1  
Chinese History and Culture LibGuide

## The Challenges

Following Stueart's (1997) discussion of the challenges of international efforts, Sun and Puterbaugh selected four areas that the project would address:

1. Physical Distance.
2. Variations in Technology.
3. Cultural Differences.
4. Sustainability.

## Physical Distance

Shandong University of Arts and Eastern University are two very different institutions. While the institutions have a great deal of information about themselves on their campus websites, the inability to physically connect with the other's campus presented a difficulty. The collaborators could not walk the campus, interact with students, and get the "feel" of the other's institution. The two libraries, while both academic, serve institutions with diverse missions. Eastern University is a small liberal arts school associated with the American Baptist Convention with no fine arts and design program. Shandong University of Arts is a school dedicated to the fine and performing arts.

The distance between the two libraries is approximately 7,000 miles. Without a physical connection, common ground was difficult to identify at first. Geographic separation is a significant obstacle. Compounding the issue of distance was a time difference of 12 hours between the two schools. By way of illustration, when it is 2 a.m. in eastern China, it is 2 p.m. in the eastern United States. Despite the physical distance and time difference, the use of social media—particularly Skype, a video conferencing tool, and Windows Live Messenger, a text messaging service—helped to mediate the dialogue between the two participants and create a close connection. Weekly Skype sessions were arranged, usually lasting 2 hours. Within the first eight months, over one hundred hours were logged using Skype. Skype-to-Skype calls were free of charge, making personal interaction between Sun and Puterbaugh economical.

During this time, the collaborators not only grew to know each other better on a personal level, they also learned of the work performed at the corresponding institutions. This learning process included introductions to other staff members and views of office life. Additionally, with the time difference so great, each was able to see a little of the other's home life. The use of Skype broke down many of the barriers of time and distance and helped the project participants develop a personal rapport.

During the Skype sessions, it was discovered that both universities have a global perspective. Eastern University's School of International Leadership Development (SILD) has been a mainstay of the university's curriculum. Eastern's English as a Second Language (ESL) programs reach out to many Asian countries, including the PRC. The school in Shandong, dedicated to the arts, also projects a global vision. The faculty, students, and alumni from the university teach and perform throughout the world. Through persistence in communication and understanding each other's perspective—and using the communication tools Skype, Live Messenger, Facebook, and e-mail—a working plan developed.

During the project, a variety of social media tools were tested for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. Skype and Windows Live Messenger were the mainstays for real-time communication. The barrier of physical distance was overcome not only by the tools at hand but also by the determination of the participants. It is important in this type of collaboration that the lines of communication be well established. Without consistent

patterns of information sharing, misunderstandings can easily occur. Both participants were dedicated to their Skype meetings and consistently exchanged reports via email and chat.

The importance of communicating on a regular basis cannot be overestimated. Johnson (2009) points out that one of the key deterrents to a successful collaboration between international partners is a lack of confidence in the other. However, with clear lines of communication established through the use of free and open tools that facilitated the development of both a professional and personal relationship, trust was a non-issue in this project. Physical distance, which once kept international partners apart for long periods of time, working silently until the next phone call or physical meeting, need no longer be an obstacle for global collaborators.

When considering the challenges posed by physical distance, the actual monetary costs of communicating by conventional means, including travel and lost working hours during travel, need to be calculated. While using social media for collaboration does not reduce the monetary costs of the actual working time spent on a project, its use may eliminate the traditional costs of travel and communication that have hampered international collaboration in the past.

## Technological Variations

With the prevalence of the Internet as a medium for communication, Stueart's (1997) barrier regarding disparities in technology may no longer appear to be a great obstacle. While working with colleagues in emerging nations, where access to the Internet is limited or non-existent, this is a formidable obstacle. In wealthier nations like the PRC and the USA, differences in technology are not a significant issue. However, the ability to access the same social media services useful for collaboration may pose a challenge.

The initial contact between Sun and Puterbaugh began in Facebook. However, over time, access to this site within the PRC became problematic. Hempel (2012) writes that while Facebook's founder Mark Zuckerberg has announced a strategy to enter the Chinese market, it has become progressively more difficult for Chinese users to access Facebook. In limiting access to outside social sites, the PRC has nurtured its own social media industry, allowing it to grow and strengthen its market position. In the absence of Facebook, two of China's social sites that have developed "have impressive chunks of market share: Renren (154 million users) and Sina Weibo (300 million users)" (Strauss, 2012).

For an international collaboration, which began in Facebook, this became a major obstacle to overcome. Neither Renren, a Facebook-like service, or Sina Weibo, a Twitter-like service, have an English-language interface. Alternative forms of communication had to be adopted.

Other English-language social sites were very useful. The professional networking site LinkedIn ([www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com)) was available in the PRC and in the USA. Likewise, Academia.edu ([www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)), a networking site for researchers, proved of some use during the collaboration.

Two services were consistently used for communication during the collaboration. The first was the Microsoft portal MSN Live. This service includes Outlook, the e-mail service; Live Messenger, an instant messaging client; and SkyDrive, a cloud-based file storage service that is integrated with web-based versions of the Microsoft Office Suite known as Windows Live Office. The Live Office service and SkyDrive provided the means for both synchronous and asynchronous development of materials. This included the joint creation of a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation used during emtacl12, the Emerging Technology in Academic Libraries conference, given on October 2, 2012, in Trondheim, Norway. At the conference, the collaborators provided a live demonstration. Puterbaugh was physically at the meeting, while Sun presented her portion of the talk from her home in China using Skype (see Figure 2).





Figure 2

*Presentation at emtacl12, Trondheim, Norway, October 2, 2012, with Mark Puterbaugh on site and Hua Sun using Skype from China. Photograph by Nils Kristian Th. Eikeland/NTNU.*

Skype allowed for real-time, face-to-face communication over the Internet. It was Skype's free video call service, more than any other social media tool, that made the collaboration possible. As with the personal visit described by Atkins et al. (2005), the face-to-face Skype meetings "transformed the exchange from a speculative venture with a distant partner into a real, tangible, and human endeavor" (p. 193). Both MSN Live and Skype provided linking services that gave Sun access to postings and chat available through Facebook. While not providing the full flexibility of the Facebook interface, Skype and MSN helped maintain a vital communication link.

MSN's Outlook e-mail was used for long asynchronous messages, and Live Messenger was used for daily short messages and comments. Skype provided the application needed for weekly video chat meetings. A Skype subscription allowed for shared screens and a three-way discussion with Eastern University's LibGuides administrator. This communication was essential during the early parts of the collaboration as Hua Sun learned to use the LibGuides service.

One important practice developed during the long-distance discussion was maintaining a separate open chat tool during Skype video call sessions. On several occasions, technical difficulties (like the dropping of a Skype session during a thunderstorm in the United States) cut the video chat short. A phone call to the other person was not practical. By maintaining an active Live Messenger chat session with each other, the difficulties were communicated and understood. These technologies lent themselves to the development of mutual confidence essential in any collaboration.

Recently, Microsoft incorporated Skype into its MSN Live service eliminating Live Messenger. In order to compensate for this loss, Tencent QQ, a service based in the PRC, has become a useful fallback tool for maintaining a separate chat session during Skype video calls. QQ offers an international instant messaging and social networking service with interfaces in English and Chinese.

## Cultural Differences

With increased globalization, cultural differences may not seem apparent. Social media tends to blind users to the underlying differences between people and nations, since everyone is using the same technologies to interact. But differences in worldview do exist. These differences must be taken into consideration when an international collaboration occurs. Abbasi et al. (2011) have noted in the literature that Eastern and Western minds approach tasks in very different ways. The critical thinking when collaborators approach a project may present unforeseen obstacles. There are also barriers such as political viewpoints and, of course, language.

Additionally, Lenartowicz, Johnson, and White (2003) report that there is much intra-country variation in culture, particularly in larger nations. Dealing with Americans or Chinese from different geographical areas can lead to misconceptions. Preconceptions based on past experience can be confusing. What is acceptable in one region of a nation may not be acceptable in another. Language usage, in particular, can be quite different, based on region and across state or provincial boundaries. Slang words and their meanings can be very difficult to communicate when having cross-cultural dialogue. Puterbaugh, a native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with unique colloquialisms, had to learn to avoid language that was confusing to someone whose English, while excellent, came from a formal education of English as a second language.

Sun and Puterbaugh discovered there was much they did not know of the other's culture. The celebration of holidays was an instance in which both parties gained new insight. Chinese New Year offered Sun an extended winter break. Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays offered Puterbaugh a lengthy time away from the office. Understanding the importance of these events in the cultural life of the participants made the pauses in workflow easier to accept and appreciate. Learning the flow of each other's life and schedule was important. Holidays and time away from the project had to be negotiated.

While cultural differences were difficult to overcome, the personal relationship developed by consistent communication mediated any strife. Through meeting and working regularly online, Sun and Puterbaugh formed a connection of mutual respect and understanding. Allen (1998) reports that collaborators must develop a sense of value for the other's contributions. They should recognize the continuing value that the other's work brings to the research process. Mutual respect overcomes many barriers, and the flexibility of both partners with regards to cultural differences is essential.

With the distances in location and differences in culture, misunderstandings can easily occur. It is important in this type of effort that the lines of communication be well established. The easy accessibility that Skype and other tools provide helped to create a sense of mutual understanding and respect. While never physically meeting, the collaborators came to know a great deal about the other's life. Due to the 12-hour time difference, a blending of home and professional life occurred. This contributed to an appreciation of both partners' worlds. The virtual face-to-face meetings allowed Sun and Puterbaugh to establish a bond of trust, respect, and friendship. When cultural differences did arise, the relationship that communication created helped bridge the gap between their two worlds.

Burt (1992) relates that collaborators from different nations have the probability of learning new (to them) notions, techniques, and methodologies from one another, increasing their personal knowledge assets. All of this has been found true by the collaborators in this project.

## Sustainability

Is it possible that small projects like this one can be maintained for long periods of time using free or inexpensive social media tools? What is the possible future of further international collaboration using social media? There are many factors affecting the sustainability of such collaboration. Among these are

1. Organizations.
2. Participants.
3. Common ground.
4. Social media tools.

## Organizations

Most collaboration among academic librarians starts when their parent institutions have prior agreements. Alleyne & Rodrigues (2011) established their collaborative, providing bibliographic instruction for both Mount Saint Vincent University's students and those at Bermuda College, based upon a prior relationship between the two institutions. The personal nature of their working relationship was based first upon the agreements at the institutional level.

Sun and Puterbaugh have demonstrated that collaborations can start between two individuals who establish a personal relationship first via social media prior to organizational involvement. Yet it quickly became evident in this case that involvement from the parent institutions was necessary if the project were to develop. Institutional resources had to be shared. An example of this would be granting Sun administrative-level access to Eastern University's LibGuides service. Another example would be the requesting of work time for the project from supervisors at both institutions.

Written and verbal agreements were exchanged between the institutions on these issues; this established ownership and legitimacy for the project. The openness of the institutions involved also promoted the experiment to the level of a service extending beyond the walls of the library to faculty and students. One such developing service

is an agreement between dance faculties to share performance videos. Gervedink Nijhuis, Voogt, and Peiters (2012) found that international collaborations are most successful when participants and organizations are stakeholders in the outcomes. As with Alleyne and Rodrigues (2011), Sun and Puterbaugh found that the acceptance by their parent organizations helped shape shared goals and outcomes, defined responsibilities, and provided the support for a successful and sustainable project.

## Participants

In writing on the cultural complexity of international collaboration, Gervedink Nijhuis et al. (2012) noted that those involved must be transparent in their communication with one another. There must be an open attitude toward the other participant's point of view. Additionally, Alleyne & Rodrigues (2011), in their discussion on sustainability, point out that there should be clear lines of communication established, avoidance of turf wars, and mutual respect for the all participants involved.

Through their previous experience using social media outlets, Sun and Puterbaugh established both a personal and professional relationship. This allowed the participants to judge whether the other was a compatible working partner. The continued use of social media throughout the project allowed the participants to maintain open attitudes. The social media tools provided a means to keep communication lines open and flexible. The willingness to use these tools made the collaboration much easier.

## Common Ground

People tend to collaborate with those they have a lot in common. Common fields, common career paths, or common interests are all factors that can promote collaboration. Social media sites and tools can assist in finding those with common interests. Discussions on sites such as Facebook are typically open and easily accessible. This is much like what Amershi & Morris (2009) observed in their study of co-located collaborative web searches. On social sites, answers and comments are often public and persistent, serving as a common space in which others can join in the collaboration and contribute strategies and solutions. Through observation of these interactions, members in these spaces may find potential collaborators for future projects.

Sun and Puterbaugh perceived a common interest in social media for international collaboration, demonstrated through their posts and discussions on Facebook. These comments were open and easily accessible, signifying that collaboration was a real possibility.

It should be noted that when common ground is established, one project may be expanded into a new endeavor. Finding common ground allows participants to evaluate their local circumstances and reach out to others having similar interests within their organizations. Sun and Puterbaugh found that in addition to creating the Chinese History and Culture LibGuide they were able to promote a small collaboration between Shandong's School of Dance and Eastern's Department of Dance. While collecting materials for the LibGuide, a door opened to begin a video exchange of student dance performances. Letters were exchanged and videos are now being shared. Expansion of this collaboration was possible because of the potential offered by social media to open communication between academic librarians and the institutions they serve.

## Social Media Tools

Social media tools play an important role in the sustainability of an international collaboration. They provide an inexpensive and readily available set of tools for open communication. However, what should be

emphasized here is the multitude of tools from which to choose. There is no need to rely on a single tool. Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Google+, Skype, and many other tools and resources provide a plethora of features that can facilitate international collaboration. There are free tools to meet every type of collaborative need.

Sun and Puterbaugh discovered as a best practice never to rely on a single tool. Free services and network connections have their limitations. Relying on one service is unnecessary and potentially detrimental to an international project. Services may discontinue or become inaccessible. It is important to be prepared and search out the best tools to use and possible alternatives. Understanding the risks of using freely available social media tools for collaboration should make current and future collaborations work more smoothly.

## Conclusion

The Chinese History and Culture site ([libguides.eastern.edu/china](http://libguides.eastern.edu/china)) continues to develop. Although residing on an Eastern University server, it clearly promotes the contribution of its partner, Shandong University of Arts. The LibGuide is now a multilevel tool for researchers. It contains informational, bibliographical, and multimedia resources for those interested in the subject matter. During the first eight months of development, the site received over 1,000 page views. Sun and Puterbaugh plan continued expansion, including interactive finding aids for those who want to explore this topic more fully.

Social media sites and tools are ubiquitous. The technology has widened the channels of communication and promoted the possibility of international engagement and collaboration. The micro-collaboration of Sun and Puterbaugh is just the beginning of the potential benefits available to the two parent institutions, their libraries, and librarianship in general. Social media allows the individual players, librarians at various institutions, to work together to create something larger than either could create alone.

Langeland (2005) noted that the theme from the 2004 Helsinki City Library Seminar was "Small is beautiful—networking makes us strong" (p. 148). Social media provides the tools to communicate across national boundaries. This ability makes individual librarians stronger as they share information and knowledge with others from around the world.

## Notes

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