



A Case Study in Multilingual Site Design: *Shaolin-Wudang.com* Teaching Site Design, Managing the Design Process, and Building a Site in China

Theresa M. (Terri) Morgan, President, Wudang Research Association
Senior Member, Society for Technical Communication
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For three weeks in November/December 2002, I was in Zhengzhou, China to help start building a website and to teach site design and authoring. It was an interesting project, to say the least. This was not my first trip to China. I first went to China as an English teacher in 1990. My history and ability to function in Chinese were in part, why I was there this time.

HOW DID THIS PROJECT GET STARTED?

In August 2002, I had been in Zhengzhou on a visit and had gone to introduce myself to the folks at the Henan Branch of the CCPIT (China Council for the Promotion of International Trade). As the equivalent of a US Chamber of Commerce, I was interested in asking about business leads for my company's consulting and publications services. As it turned out, the Secretary General of the CCPIT Henan Branch, Mr. Fan Guojun, had several projects underway on which we found some common ground. I had a book (currently only in English) for business travelers.¹ He had been working on course development to help Chinese business travelers with their English. He had also been considering the creating a travel and tourism web site promoting international travel to the area, specifically for martial artists. Both areas of special interest to me. I have been working with English/Chinese site development since 1996 and I've been teaching and practicing Chinese martial arts for about 18 years.² I couldn't stay in August, so Mr. Fan arranged a grant through the UN Development Programme and invited me to return to China in November. *(photo: Mr. Fan Guojun and Ms. Terri Morgan at the entry to the CCPIT offices in Zhengzhou, December 2002.)*



¹ The Wudang Research Association provides consulting and business services including multilingual site development. Our specialty languages are English and Chinese. In 2000, we published *Going East or West? A Handbook for American and Chinese Business Travelers* (ISBN 0-9672889-1-6) This book addresses practical, cultural, and management issues from both points of view.

² Terri has been an invited judge at international martial arts events since 1995. She is a two-time US National champion (1989, 1994) and has won multiple awards including first place in China (1997).

WHY ARE MARTIAL ARTS IMPORTANT TO TOURISM IN HENAN?

Henan is the home of the Shaolin Temple at Song Shan, the White Horse Temple (Baimasi), the Dragon Gate Caves (Longmen), Chen Village, and many other historical sites of interest to martial arts students. Anyone who studies Shaolin martial arts wants to visit the Shaolin Temple. Similarly, the Chen Village is of special interest to anyone who studies the Chen style of taijiquan. Every two years, the city of Zhengzhou hosts an International Shaolin Festival which attracts hundreds of



top tourism destinations and would continue to be for some time. With the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, it's reasonable to expect that WuShu (standardized martial arts forms) will be part of whatever opening performance is planned. There has been discussion for several years regarding including wushu events in the games. This also means that many of those interested in martial arts will want to travel a bit while they are in the country, and the Shaolin Temple in Henan is going to be high on the list of sites many will want to visit.

PROJECT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

At the core, the main issues we faced were the same as those faced by anyone who wants to build a web site. Where will it live? Who will take care of updates? Who will handle site reporting and administration? Were will the content come from?

What made these issues a bit more challenging in this case were the technical requirements, the administrative questions related to acquisition of content, and the time, which was altogether too short.

Because of my history with China and fluency in Chinese, I was able to avoid or minimize

international guests. Henan Province is related geographically to China as the State of Kansas is to the United States. In fact, there is an official sister-state relationship between the two which helps facilitate trade and business relationships. The capital city, Zhengzhou, besides being an ancient capital city, is a major passenger railway junction.

The overall international travel and tourism market is substantial. The US Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates Exports of Private Services in Travel (not including passenger fares) for 2001 totaled \$71,119 million with Imports in the same category of \$60,117 million that same year. Industry reports in 2002 indicated that China was one of the

photos: Top: View of Zhengzhou from across the lake in People's Park. Bottom: Traffic around the central clock tower in Zhengzhou. August 2002.



many of the cultural and linguistic issues that someone else might have had more difficulty managing. But I was still pushing my limits. Teaching site design and development in a short timeframe can be challenging anyway; this was going to be the first time I'd be trying to do it Chinese in a formal Chinese setting.

I had a dual role as designer/developer and teacher for this project. One part of the project was to actually build a site; another part was for me to introduce development and project management concepts specific to multilingual design. This included methods ranging from creating a project plan to criteria for evaluating content. Even though, I have been studying Chinese language for about 12 years I was really stretching for this one.

My two co-workers were both very bright and willing but inexperienced. Neither had built a web site. Ms. Li Nan had coded a few HTML pages for fun and she had some understanding of SQL reporting. Mr. Fan Xuzhou had studied Visual Basic/Basic and some other languages, including a little HTML but had never applied any of it outside the classroom.

The time factor was a challenge throughout the project. I

was only going to be in Zhengzhou for three weeks. We had the usual discussions of work hours, lunch, and other administrative stuff. Michael (Fan Xuzhou) explained that their normal working hours were 8:30-12:00 and 2:30-5:30. This was more or less what I had expected and would be similar for a comparable office.

Lunch has always been rather important in China and many consider it is the most important meal of the day. However, in the new development taking place in

China, work hours can be quite different. This distinction is fundamentally the difference between institutional and entrepreneurial schedules.

I explained that in the US, we would normally have one hour (in some cases 30 minutes) for lunch. Even so, when you have a project with a deadline, the normal workday is extended to include whatever it takes to complete whatever needs to be done in the time allowed. This means that developers frequently work on some level of flex-time. The upside with flex-time is setting a personal schedule. The downside is that weekends are frequently included in the work-week.

For the most part, we operated on a normal Chinese schedule, but toward the end of my time there, we shifted to a US development schedule, with Michael and I exchanging phone calls about 10:30 at night to discuss build issues.

The change came with the recognition that the text, images and illustrations were not going just somehow appear on the pages.

This is a common problem. Those who have only had the



photos: Top: A busy shopping plaza in Zhengzhou. August 2002. Bottom: Light traffic along Renmin Lu near the central part of the city.

experience of creating one or two personal pages usually find that building a site takes a bit more.

Another is the misconception that the site will be finished when the pages are first “completed” and posted for review. There will always be something that will need to be changed or adjusted. This notion is critical but is often difficult to understand until you have been through a full design process at least once.

ARRIVING AND GETTING STARTED

The trip to Zhengzhou from Kansas City is a long one, about 16-18 hours air time plus time in the terminals for connections. I had a morning flight from Kansas City to Chicago; then waited in Chicago for afternoon boarding of the flight to Beijing. It was a direct flight with airtime of about 14 hours and was pretty much on time. I already had a three hour wait at the Beijing airport, but when the flight from Beijing to Zhengzhou was delayed, I spend about five hours in the airport. Instead of arriving in

Zhengzhou at about 9 pm, the flight was just leaving Beijing about 10 pm. Tired does not begin to describe the way I felt. By the time I cleared immigration and customs, was met and taken to the hotel, it was well after midnight local time. I slept very well that night.

Because I knew the trip would be tiring, I had arranged my arrival a few days in advance so I

would have some time to rest before we started work on Monday. Mr. Fan had arranged a welcome dinner for me on Saturday. Such a dinner is part of Chinese traditional customs for receiving guests. It was very enjoyable. It also gave us a chance to lay the groundwork for our work relationship and the way we both hoped to proceed. I had brought a bottle of California red



Photo: Above: Jenny He (an interpreter in the CCPIT office), Terri Morgan, Yang Xiling, and Fan Guojun at dinner. The Yue Xiu Jiu Jia is one of Zhengzhou’s finer restaurants. It is exclusively decorated in the classical Chinese style and specializes in traditional Chinese food. Below: An ancient commemorative urn stands in the newly-restored gardens of a park along Renmin Lu in central Zhengzhou.

wine as a present for my hosts which we all enjoyed very much. Not only is a little red wine good for the health, everyone who travels enjoys tasting the flavors of “somewhere else.”

THE WORK PLAN?

I didn’t know what I would have to do nor with whom I would be working until the first day. I had prepared a tentative work plan and had outlines for the design classes. I had factored in the scheduling and other known issues, so that I actually had several contingency plans ready. Since I was not only going to be working to develop the site but also teaching the development process, having several options ready was critical. If I couldn’t demonstrate and work through the process of creating contingency plans, I was not going to be effective in teaching the

design process. That we were going to be doing it “live” just made things a bit more interesting.

The first day, I introduced the idea of separating our work over the three weeks according to the

major areas we would need to address. During the first week, we would discuss and resolve the server and ISP questions. The second week, we would concentrate on design issues and

create the framework we would be using. The third week, we would start building the site and start developing the libraries that would be needed to support the site.

To create the site, I had recommended Dreamweaver and Photoshop. Both have a good range and can be used by novices and experts alike. The database connectivity tools in Dreamweaver would be an advantage later while the code editing tools would be perfect for what we needed to do at the beginning. Photoshop not only provides high-end functionality, the save for web feature allows file compression for fast-loading images, something that was going to be important with all the photos planned for the site.

The first day, we went to the local bookstore (quite large actually, with 5 floors of very crowded shelves and lots of people) to get books/CDs for both programs. This proved very useful to everyone and was culturally very well received. Chinese culture highly values study. So both Li Nan and Fan Xuzhou were very happy to be learning new software.

After we bought the books, we went to lunch. Myself, Yang Xiling a longtime friend and for this project a co-worker, and Li Nan, a young lady who was one of two people assigned to the project. Li Nan knew about a dumpling restaurant that had just opened. We had “hun tun” (dumpling soup) and several other dishes. It was excellent and inexpensive. For me, this was a real treat! Many westerners do not know about the varieties of dumplings, fillings and the tasty soups, vegetables, and meat dishes, and might have opted for the McD’s nearby.

UNDERSTANDING HOW TO ASK THE QUESTIONS

Each day, there were questions that had to be answered in order to continue the development process. Every answer



Above: Beta design for website language home pages. The main page of the site uses an international map and provides language selection options. Once a language has been selected, the main page for that language is displayed using a common template and images.

implied capabilities and limitations. Each choice created dependencies.

Site hosting questions had to be answered first as they impact the development and maintenance significantly. Server types and features offered can limit the tools, methods, and functionality that is available and can be used.

We started with some discussion of servers, server types, and related issues. First, I introduced the need to know what questions should be asked. For instance, What level of support is needed from the ISP? What are the tools provided to the webmaster? What level of access to the server is provided? What are the

In this case, I recommended a server running an opensource version of Linux/UNIX rather than a Microsoft product for a number of practical and budgetary reasons.

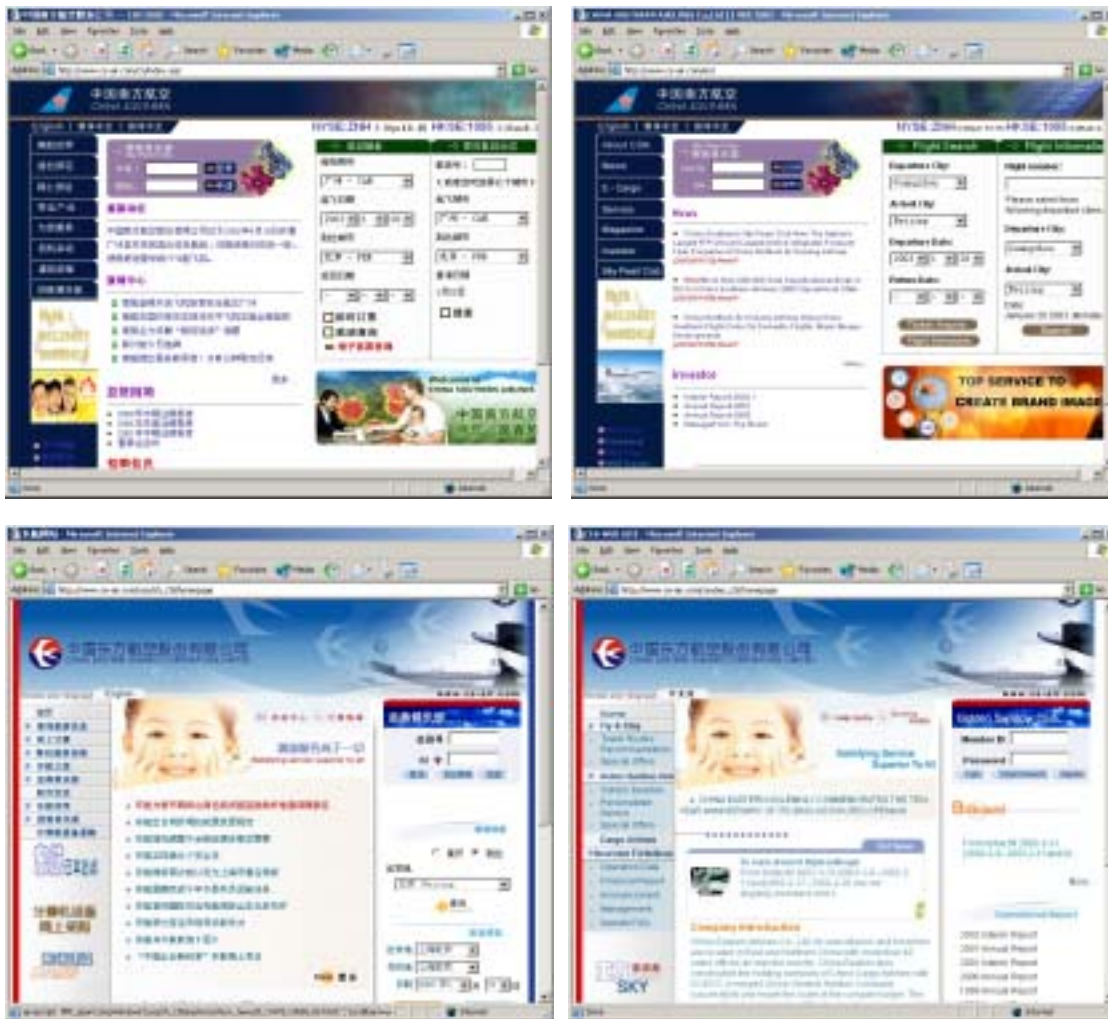
Other issues related to the server include access to site traffic reports, tools for site maintenance, and support for scripting languages.

Why is any of this important? These questions and the answers to them form the foundation of the site. Since the goal for this site was to include multilingual pages, the practical follow-on question is which language is first? Which will be the source language? When the translation work is started, which language will be the first target?

updated? On what basis? Who will manage and perform the updates?

One way to answer these questions is via an analysis of the site traffic logs. Not only can the page views be determined, but the source of the traffic can also be determined. It then becomes possible to set clear priorities. If, for example, most of the visitors to the site are coming from sites in Spanish-speaking countries, wouldn't it be useful to work on the translations for those pages first?

Traffic logs also have a number of other business-related implications. The selection of a server is important because traffic logs are generated on the server.



These two sites show examples of dual-language sites that take different approaches to what they provide in each language. The upper pair is identical with the exception of select graphics and the language. The lower pair provides more limited resources from the English page than from the Chinese page.

Most of the time, software to analyze the raw data used to generate the reports would be run on the server. Therefore the server and server software make a huge difference to the success of the site.

DEFINING THE SITE PURPOSE

The second week, we started work on the pages. At the beginning of this part of the process, I asked for definition of the purpose of the site. Since the purpose ultimately drives content acquisition, display, and explicitly or by implication, definition of the audience, it is critical to have a clear, concise statement of purpose to help guide the design process. We spent the better part of two days working on this one point.

We quickly moved to drawing little boxes on a whiteboard to represent pages with colored lines to show links. While this type of map was initially a new to my colleagues, they quickly understood and became quite adept at using the markers to highlight their ideas.

At each point for each page, we discussed what we as users might like to see on the page according to the purpose we had defined. This is really one of the fun parts of any site design project.

There are no limits. We all get to use our imaginations!

However, we also had to be realistic about the time, money, and other issues. With each step of the discussion, I pointed out the implications of the decisions we were making and tried to show where there were alternatives.

Each time we made a decision, we had to keep in mind both the level of effort to create it as well as the time required to maintain it and this across multiple languages.

At the core of the design we developed was the concept of a world map highlighting China as the home page with language selections only. Once inside, the visitor would be presented with materials in the selected language.

THE FINISHED WORK

The final week, according to the original schedule, we were supposed to be building the site and libraries. Needless to say, we were running behind. While I had expected this would happen, it was part of the learning process for my co-workers.

Moving from concept to build is where most projects encounter the greatest difficulty. It's easy to discuss and think of pages in

conceptual terms, it's quite another to actually define "what goes here." Who is going to collect the photos, write the text, define the file names/conventions and create the directory structures? What words are we actually going to use on the navigation buttons? Where are the photos and articles? Are the travel schedules or general itineraries ready for the travel pages?

The impact of this stark reality was not fully realized until we started running out of time and wanted to have something we could all look at. This is the normal reality for any development project. At some point, you have to actually "do something" in order to enable the next phase of the process. In this case, we had to have a home page and at least one destination page for each language.

CLOSING

One of the first problems came in the design of the home page. We had agreed on a global map with figures performing martial arts. Great idea. Where's the map? Where are the figures?

The current version of the map is one that started with a standard piece of clip art, modified in Photoshop to include multiple lights and textures.

Working design according to the discussions and ideas we applied.



We were still looking for the figures when I left Zhengzhou. For our design, the figures had to be appropriate to the three major martial arts (wudang, shaolin, taiji) but they should also have other characteristics to make them clear and recognizable.

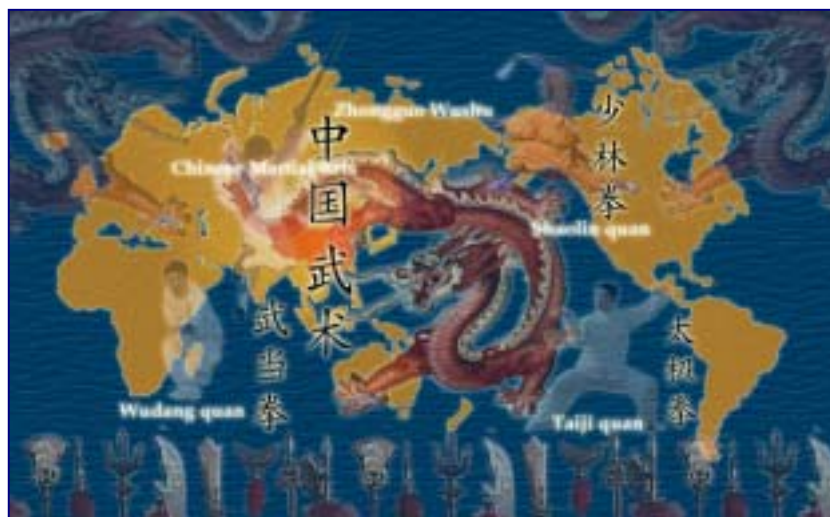
Finding images we could use proved to be more difficult than we had thought. We needed something to compensate and provide something that could be used until appropriate figures could be found.



That's where the earlier decision to limit the initial languages to English and Chinese made a temporary design possible. Even though it was contrary to our agreement to use images and not text, text was the easiest to acquire. And we were out of time.

As long as we only had two languages, we could use text for a very nice design effect. The problem, however, was that the initial design was intended to eventually include several languages on the inner pages. With multiple languages, the page could easily become overly cluttered.

On the presentation level, we were also faced with translation issues. What text should appear on the navigation buttons? What should it say? A word or phrase that might be fine in English just didn't translate well into Chinese and vice-versa.



The final week was busy trying to resolve many difficulties and issues before I left. During our decision process, we agreed to arrange for an ISP in Beijing that provided a toll-free support number and good pricing. While I was not overwhelmingly in favor of this, I agreed that all things considered it would be the best choice.

We arranged for access and started building our files. I contacted the name registrar to point the name to the server in Beijing. Needless to say, there were issues with this as well. The basis for the internet is IP addressing. And there is a problem with getting the ISP and the international nameserver and the name registrar to all talk to each other. In this case, it's a bit like moving and not telling the post office to deliver your mail to the new address.

The issues and problems we had to manage for this project were common for any development project, but they were made more complex by the differences in work habits and culture.

The most important factor and the key to the success we achieved was the recognition that we shared common goals and could discuss

our ideas. Some of the issues we had to resolve were different than those that would have taken precedence in the US. I expected this, after all, I was in China. China has its own culture and its own ways of doing things.

One of the things that fascinates me about the internet is the convergence of cultures that takes place when we start discussing everything on a global basis. Once we had covered some fundamental evaluation concepts, started the design process and began actually developing the ideas, there was an amazing similarity and agreement in the suggestions and solutions. As much attention as is given to cultural factors in design, many of the most important factors are human.

Terri Morgan is a Senior member of STC and President of the Wudang Research Association. She can be reached at tmorgan@wudang.com.

***Above left: Navigation buttons for main language pages;
Above right: A possible design for the main page with multiple images***