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# Back Talk-To China or Not to China: International Branch Campus (IBC) Libraries

Anthony W. Ferguson  
anthony.ferguson185@gmail.com

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The New Digital Age isn't about **Google** as much as it is about the world **Google** helped create and runs. In fact, if you pick up the book to get some insights into the company, it will disappoint. **Google** is everywhere and nowhere.

**Schmidt** stopped by the *Colbert Report* on the book tour. The show — catch it at the Comedy Central Website — is its best summary. **Schmidt**, who cannot stop smiling by nature — a net worth of seven billion helps — talked about the great things the Internet gave us in such a short time and what it promised. Central to digital pills, driverless cars, and hairstyling robots was connectivity. Today two billion users were connected to one another through the Internet benefiting from its disruptive impact on everything.

Of course, **Colbert** wanted a pair of **Google Glass**, the soon to be released browser in your eyeglasses mobile computing tool. And **Colbert** praised *Angry Birds'* transformative impact on his life. **Schmidt** didn't break smile and continued his argument, central to his thesis, of the certain disruption of five billion users of cheap smartphones worldwide. The New Digital Age is all about how to shape this world for the better.

Most of the book reads like a Foreign Policy article on global connectivity. The world they visited over the last few years profoundly touched them. They experienced a troubled world coping primarily through Internet connectivity.

In post-Saddam Iraq **Schmidt** and **Cohen** observed the absolute necessity of handheld phones to coordinate daily life. They concluded that virtual life trumped the physical world whose infra-structure was absolutely disrupted.

Similarly, the Arab Spring brought the virtual world into direct conflict with the physical.

Social media could be used to circumvent dictatorial control of a country's Internet. Literally revolution was a virtual step ahead of real world oppression.

Fortunately, the New Digital Age is not so naïve as to argue connectivity is an exclusively positive force.

**Schmidt** finds no love won in and about China. He writes carefully about state terrorism — the Chinese government as cyber bully — and China's perennial disregard for intellectual property — the advantages of state capitalism. **Schmidt** seems poised to say more about China and its relationship to **Google** but he stops short — preferring to frame China's Internet role as the world's problem.

On **Colbert**, **Schmidt** smiled when he told **Colbert** it was a real book, 330 pages, no pictures or charts. He thought this was a good thing. Actually, some charts could have helped explain the data and arguments made from the data. Also, the argument, developed from observation from both inside and outside the agency of change — a company like **Google** — could have used more research than that cited. There are only two books cited while the rest are Internet links from what's available from a **Google** search of the open Internet.

Without more authoritative sources, the book risks being supported on a wobbly research stool of just observation and Internet sources.

For example, recent scholarship disputes the view that social media played the major role in the Arab Spring. Human events aren't so easily reduced to technological change. And **Mr. Schmidt**, why not a single mention of books and technology's role in the wider access and availability of knowledge?

If we are going to believe, understand, and do what **Eric Schmidt** would do, we need more than foreign policy lite. What **Eric** would do is probably what **Google** would do and does; it takes much more to save the world than a search engine and one of its guiding leaders.

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Clint Chamberlain  
University of Texas at Arlington



[www.wtcox.com](http://www.wtcox.com)

### Your Citation and Links:

**Eric Schmidt** and **Jared Cohen** "The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Businesses" NY: Knopf, 2013.

<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/425750/april-23-2013/eric-schmidt> 🐼

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So, now that I have a clearer picture of why **IBCs** have been established, the difficulties they experience, and at least a little about the life of a **ICB** librarian would be like, what should I do? Stay here in Arizona enjoying the life of a semi-retired academic librarian, or should I return to China to work in an **IBC** library? I will let you know what I decided to do in my next **Back Talk** article.

### Post Note

Following the publication of my February 2013 column concerning **Martin Luther King** and dreams for libraries, I received an email pointing to a group which played an important role in the advancement of minority librarians during and since the time of **Dr. King**: The **Black Caucus of ALA**. You can go to [http://](http://www.bcla.org)

[www.bcla.org](http://www.bcla.org) for a complete history of the **Black Caucus** and the part it played in all of this. Thanks to **Pamela Bluh**, the Associate Director for Technical Services and Administration at the **University of Maryland's Thurgood Marshall Law Library** for sharing this information with me.

### Resources Reviewed

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# Back Talk — To China or not to China: International Branch Campus (IBC) Libraries



Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library and Information Science Consultant, 15419 S. Via Rancho Grande, Sahuarita, AZ 85629; Phone: 520-561-6411; former Hong Kong University Librarian) <anthony.ferguson185@gmail.com>

**R**ecently, I have been thinking about stepping temporarily out of retirement to help further establish an **IBC Library** in China. That has caused me to do some exploratory research on the reasons why universities would want to establish a branch campus in another country; the challenges they face when they do; and what the libraries on these campuses are like and what it would be like to work in one.

## Reasons for Branch Campuses

Perhaps like most things in life, “it is the money, stupid.” For parents and governments eager to secure up-to-date, western-style educations for their young people, being able to give them this sort of education at a much-reduced cost is very attractive. Moreover, they can worry less about these students adopting “foreign ways” or not returning to their home countries. National and local governments have been supportive of **IBCs** because they believe that education and research are linked to a country’s economic development.

For western universities faced with ever-deepening reductions in support from their own governments, **IBCs** mean more students and more tuition dollars. International campuses also provide global visibility which can be translated into opportunities for grants and other forms of fundraising. Of course there are significant costs associated with setting up a branch campus but in many cases these funds come from local and national governments. But money isn’t the only reason for these universities to expand globally. **IBCs** also provide opportunities for their own students and staff to deepen their understanding of the history and culture of other countries.

Another reason for the growth in **IBCs** relates to the emergence of a global culture in which young people are much more alike than ever before, meaning that the educational

system of one country is much more easily transferred to another country than ever before. Finally, with more than one-third of the world’s population with high-speed Internet connectivity, the ability for students in one country to simultaneously interact with teachers and students in another country is increasingly commonplace. While this sort of educational experience cannot replace the face-to-face interaction that most international students want, it can supplement and enrich the traditional mode of obtaining a university education.

## Challenges Faced When Establishing Branch Campuses

Fear of the unknown seems to be one of the greatest challenges facing universities expanding internationally. Everyone within the home institution with a stake in maintaining the status quo is likely to be afraid of what the establishment of an **IBC** might mean, e.g., will it drain funds needed for the main campus and its mission? If the **IBC** fails to maintain the same level of quality enjoyed by the main campus, will the overall reputation of the university be tarnished? These fears, however, are not the only challenges facing a global university. Like any new business, there will be a need for a significant amount of capital to meet payroll and other costs while a sufficient number of tuition paying students are recruited. **Michigan State University**, for example, had to close one of its overseas programs down for the lack of such funds. Maintaining sufficient faculty commitment is another major challenge. Unless a sufficient number of faculty members from the home campus are willing to take their turn teaching at the **IBC**, the quality of the program will deteriorate and insufficient numbers of bill paying students will be recruited.

Cultural issues can also pose a challenge to the success of branch campuses. For example, teachers from one country may not understand

how students and others will expect them to behave and find themselves in trouble for just doing the same things as they would have back home. Pushing new ways of doing things can also be interpreted as cultural imperialism resulting in bad press and student protests.

Host governments can also pose a number of challenges when, because of changing economic conditions, they cannot fulfill all of the promises they made when it was agreed that a branch campus might be established. Should this happen, the quality of the program can suffer and again an insufficient number of students to pay the bills will be recruited. Host governments with their own research and training agendas can become disappointed when foreign-controlled educational programs fail to deliver positive local economic outcomes.

## Characteristics of IBC Libraries and What it Would be Like to Work in One

While I have visited all sorts of libraries during my career from hourly rental libraries in the alleys of Taiwan; to scores of wonderful academic libraries in many countries; and to many of the great national libraries of the world, I have yet to go to an **IBC Library**. Fortunately, however, an excellent article by **Harriet Green** on **IBC Libraries** published earlier this year in *College and Research Libraries* can shed some light on them. On the basis of her survey of **IBC** librarians, **Green** indicates that these branch librarians pursue many of the same objectives as at their home institutions. One **IBC** librarian, for example, indicated that she/he sought not only to teach students how to access the information they need but also to evaluate it for “accuracy and reliability.” In at least some cases, the **IBC** and home campus provide access to part if not all of the same collections of electronic books, reference tools, and periodicals.

An especially interesting part of her article to me was the information provided on why librarians choose to work in **IBC Libraries**. Many indicate that they were tired of what they had been doing and just wanted a change of place and the work to be done. Many have also found that working in another country and in a new library has given them the opportunity to build a program from the ground up. **IBC** librarians are pioneers, if not explorers, and that sort of life is exhilarating for many. But everything is not easy for this kind of librarian. Common complaints include the difficulty of finding the right support staff, being isolated from other professional colleagues, the lack of sufficient funding, patron complaints, difficulties collaborating/communicating with library staff members back home, and being unable to communicate with patrons easily because of language and cultural differences.

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