

PGN Matters: PGN, Our Family

XUELIAN JIN, *University of Sheffield*

My name is Xuelian Jin, a third year PhD student in the Department of Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield. I am also the newly elected vice chair of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network. Ruth, the chair, introduced the conventional ways to get involved with the MeCCSA PGN, including visiting our website at <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/>, joining us by either registering as an individual member or automatically becoming one if your institution is a member of MeCCSA (check the list of member institutions at <http://www.meccsa.org.uk/about/list-of-members/>), subscribing to the MeCCSA-PGN Jiscmail list, and attending our annual Postgraduate Conference. Here I would love to add a new channel: our Facebook group named MeCCSA PGN Network and, more importantly, my own understanding of why getting involved in the network is important according to my experience.

My experience might not be common, but it is definitely not unique. I came from China and started my PhD study in 2010, which was my first time abroad. In my first two years, I attended numerous modules, lectures, training sessions, seminars, conferences, workshops and other events where I listened to and talked with researchers from different cultural backgrounds on a great range of topics. Those experiences have dramatically – and in some aspects, completely – changed my views of the world and life. I first learned how different and diverse people and cultures operated and began to question the knowledge, understandings, and common sense I had established in my own culture. For example, in the Chinese culture, there is a right answer to every question. In the Western culture, meanwhile, there is always more than one right answer to every question.

Attending those events was marvellous and rewarding. It is like travelling. And through it I experienced something wonderful, something exciting, something different, and something inspiring. However, also like travelling, I felt myself an outsider – a visitor. I came and went. Nothing was left except a few pictures and some beautiful memories. I may come back another time, but I never feel like a part of it.

What makes MeCCSA PGN different is that the network is our home, our family, instead of another travelling spot. It is a home for every MeCCSA postgraduate who wants to get involved. Among all the conferences I attended in the UK, the 2012 MeCCSA PGN Conference was the first one at which I felt truly at home. It was at the conference where I met postgraduates who had common interests in related research topics and who shared experiences of going through the excitement and frustration of different stages of our projects. Moreover, it is MeCCSA PGN which makes me feel that I can be a part of it and shape it to better serve postgraduates like me. All MeCCSA PGN committee members are postgraduates elected by postgraduates who

attended the annual conference. With MeCCSA PGN, every member has the equal chance to elect, to be elected, and to get involved in any other way that our members wish – and it works in an easily efficient fashion. For example, I was elected the vice chair when I expressed my genuine interest and enthusiasm to serve postgraduates.

It is my belief that postgraduates are a special group whose identity is temporary. On the one hand, we know that networks matter and we are all eager to build up and maintain networks. On the other hand, we are unsure where our future will be. We do not know which networks will help and how they might help. We do not know quite where to invest our time and effort. Understanding our members as who they are, therefore, MeCCSA PGN wants to do two things for our members.

At first, MeCCSA PGN ensures that it will still be there for us when we move on, wherever that may be. Join MeCCSA PGN on Facebook, and we will always be a member of this big family wherever we go. Second, it is we – every member of the family – who serve ourselves. No one knows you better than yourself. Speak out on the Facebook group or contact us if you know what you need and how the network can support you, and then we together can shape it to serve you and other members better. Equally important is to keep daily conversations among members, to share useful information, asking for help, posting your new findings, or expressing your frustrations. It relies on every member of the family and will benefit all of us, because it is through those random chats and flows of small pieces of information that we can know each other better and can in turn find opportunities for future collaboration.