

# ESL Teacher Training Seminar

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## Outline

- ✦ Welcoming remarks
- ✦ Some personal information
- ✦ Who are international students?
- ✦ The psyche of an international student
- ✦ Reaching out to an international student
- ✦ Some novice pitfalls
- ✦ Final remarks

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## Some Personal Information

- ✦ Born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- ✦ Ethnically Chinese
- ✦ Multilingual: Cantonese, Malaysian, English, Hakka, Mandarin
- ✦ A “veteran” international student
  - 1982-1988: Adelaide, Australia
  - 1988-1991: Princeton, New Jersey

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## More Personal Information

- ✦ Christian; member of Faith EFC
- ✦ Professor of Electrical & Computer Engineering
- ✦ Professor of Mathematics
- ✦ Active in international student ministry
- ✦ Active in faculty ministry
- ✦ Amateur philosopher

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## Assumptions

- ✦ ESL teachers are interested in:
  - Friendship with internationals
  - Learning about other cultures and ways of thinking
  - Reaching out with Christ’s love
  - Evangelism

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## Who are International Students?

- ✦ Academic elite, cream of the crop.
- ✦ Potential leaders of their home countries’ future.
- ✦ Likely well to do in their home countries.
- ✦ From a multitude of religions.
- ✦ From a multitude of political ideologies.
- ✦ Even from a single country, many kinds.

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## Example: PRC

- ✦ Can be divided into three major “generations”:
  - Older Generation (40 to 60)
  - Middle Generation (29 to 39)
  - Younger Generation (18 to 28)

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## PRC: Older Generation

- ✦ Mostly visiting scholars.
- ✦ Strongest ties with Chinese tradition.
- ✦ Suffered most during China’s Cultural Revolution.
- ✦ 95% will return home.
- ✦ Poorest adaptability to new culture and language.

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## PRC: Middle Generation

- ✦ Grew up in “new China:” strict regimen of atheistic Communism.
- ✦ Disillusionment and “crisis of belief.”
- ✦ Ambitious, hard-working, critical.
- ✦ High adaptability to American culture.
- ✦ Hope to settle in the US.

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## PRC: Younger Generation

- ✦ “The lucky generation:” didn’t experience hardships of Cultural Revolution.
- ✦ Little/no faith in Communism.
- ✦ Idealistic, confident, competitive.
- ✦ Many plan to stay in the US.

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## International Student Psyche

- ✦ What is in their minds?
- ✦ How do they feel?
- ✦ What do they think of being here?
- ✦ What do they think of you?
- ✦ Why are they in an ESL class?

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## A Thought Experiment

- ✦ Imagine a far-away planet where you can improve your life in dramatic ways
- ✦ You’re around 18–28
- ✦ Leave your family and friends
- ✦ May not always feel welcome there
- ✦ Don’t know anybody there

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## A Thought Experiment (cont.)

- ✦ Speak different language
- ✦ Look and dress differently
- ✦ Different cultural norms:  
E.g.: It's rude to eat with your mouth closed.
- ✦ Favorite past-time: chewing tobacco

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## A Thought Experiment (cont.)

- ✦ Cost of traveling there (one-way): \$50,000
- ✦ Apartment rent: \$35,000
- ✦ Hamburger: \$175
- ✦ Tuition: \$740,000 per academic year (CSU-type school)
- ✦ Possibility of getting a job that pays \$40,000 per month, but may take time to find.

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## Insecurities

- ✦ Family
- ✦ Language
- ✦ Culture
- ✦ Finances
- ✦ Social interaction
- ✦ Isolation

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## Family

- ✦ May be the first time away from family.
- ✦ Strong sense of duty and debt toward family.

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## Language

- ✦ English proficiency
  - To study and get good grades.
  - Maintain self-esteem among Americans.
- ✦ Fear of "losing face."
- ✦ Limited vocabulary.
- ✦ Problems with idiomatic English, colloquialisms, accent.

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## Culture

- ✦ Basic conflict: want to assimilate quickly, but deeply attached to own culture.
- ✦ Limited time to adjust.
- ✦ Confusion with American clichés, colloquialisms, humor, body language, behavior (social rules and norms).

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## Finances

- ⌘ Huge disparity in cost of living.
- ⌘ Humble living conditions; minimal monthly allowance for food.
- ⌘ American materialism.

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## Social Interaction

- ⌘ Frustrations with learning appropriate English.
- ⌘ Feeling racial discrimination.
- ⌘ Feeling unwelcome.
- ⌘ Insensitivity from Americans.

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## Isolation

- ⌘ Lonely, but cultural tradition may keep them isolated.
- ⌘ Spouses especially experience isolation and boredom.  
(Many ESL students are spouses.)

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## Reaching Out

- ⌘ Be a friend.
- ⌘ Friendship before evangelism.
- ⌘ "Accommodationist" approach.
- ⌘ Walk the talk.

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## Pitfalls: Common Source

- ⌘ Humans: multi-faceted.
- ⌘ Examples: Language, attire, knowledge of current affairs.
- ⌘ We adjust our behavior according to our perception of these facets, by associating them with more basic properties (e.g., maturity, social stature, level of education).
- ⌘ Typical "pattern" of facets: huge difference between Americans and internationals.

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## Language and Maturity

- ⌘ When speaking with a child, we use simple language (because of limited language skills).
- ⌘ When speaking with a child, we talk about unsophisticated things.
- ⌘ Pitfall: when speaking with an international, we talk about unsophisticated things.

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## Superficial Friendship

- ✦ Friendships in America demand less commitment than in many other cultures.
- ✦ Ulterior motive?

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## Sports

- ✦ An obsession in America.
- ✦ Not likely to interest international students.
- ✦ Many internationals view sports as an indulgence, a vice, a folly.

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## Humor

- ✦ Takes different forms in different cultures.
- ✦ Expression of humor and lightheartedness may be more inhibited in some cultures.

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## Does Yes Mean Yes?

- ✦ In some cultures, it is rude to say “no.”
- ✦ So “yes” may not mean “yes.”
- ✦ Other similar pitfalls: nodding, flattery, self-deprecation.

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## Poor Understanding of Culture

- ✦ Seek to understand the cultural background of your students.
- ✦ Adapt to their way of thinking.
- ✦ Cultural norms may be vastly different.
- ✦ 1 Cor. 9:19–23  
“To the Chinese, I become like a Chinese, to win the Chinese.”

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## Ideological Ignorance

- ✦ Seek to understand the major ideologies of your students.
- ✦ Example: what’s the difference between Confucianism and Communism?
- ✦ Pitfall: Hasty attack of foreign philosophies without first understanding them.

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## Insensitivity Toward Bonds Between Internationals

- # Why do birds of the same feather flock together?
- # Respect the need for internationals to bond with each other.
- # "Citizens of the world?"

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## Poor Evangelism

- # American-style aggressiveness.
- # Goal-oriented approach.
- # "Fast-food" evangelism.
- # Point-by-point presentation.
- # Too hasty to share the gospel.

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## Final Remarks

- # You are a missionary!
- # Resources
  - ISI Online: [www.isionline.org](http://www.isionline.org)
  - *Reaching Students From the People's Republic of China*, by Joshua Zhong, ISI 1997.

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