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

Some Personal Information

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

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

Assumptions

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

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.
Example: PRC

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

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.

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.

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.

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?

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

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

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

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

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.

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.
Superficial Friendship

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

Sports

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

Humor

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

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.

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.”

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.
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?”

Poor Evangelism

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

Final Remarks

- You are a missionary!
- Resources
  - ISI Online: www.isionline.org