

ESL Teacher Training Seminar

Edwin Chong

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
 - *Reaching Students From the People's Republic of China*, by Joshua Zhong, ISI 1997.

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