

Report on China Trip

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I was delighted to participate in the trip to China from June 11 to July 3, 1991. This trip provided University of Richmond faculty seminar group firsthand information about Chinese culture and exposed the group to an inevitable "culture shock" due to differences experienced in China. To examine the positive as well as negative aspects of this trip, I would like to praise the good ones and offer "constructive criticisms" for the "not so good" ones.

Advantages for faculty members intaking on an international trip in order to equip them with substantial and relevant information for the textual explanations and analyses are several. First, faculty members have an opportunity to tie the textual information to "real" experience learned from their trip. We were in China for almost twenty days, interacting with Chinese culture on a daily basis and communicating and exchanging opinions, ideas and thoughts with Chinese people day in and day out during the trip. Faculty members are in a better position to analyze and interpret Asian texts because of what they observed and learned from this trip. For example, Confucian doctrines are no longer just "abstract philosophy" and a school of thoughts. They become social norms and rules governing and dictating every aspect of

daily interaction in the Chinese community as well as some other societies (e.g., Japan and Korea) influenced by Confucianism.

Secondly, this trip helps facilitate faculty understanding of context. To study a text is one thing and to understand the context of the text is another. This is especially important because Chinese culture is a collectivist and high-context culture, which de-emphasizes individualism and specific instructions or directions of course of conduct. In other words, individuals are expected to follow rules embedded in the context. Hence, to expose ourselves to the social and physical contexts of Chinese culture is beneficial to our understanding and interpretation of texts.

Finally, to embark an international trip itself aids our appreciation of diversity. Diversity is not merely a concept or an ideal for social or political reform simply to prepare our students for future challenges. Diversity is a reality faced by everybody domestically and globally. We are required to respect and value "differences" existing among various cultures in order for participation in the rebuilding of "new world order" and "global civilization". Hence, to travel abroad is the first step to socialize faculty members to the value of diversity.

However, it is important to notice that we certainly can improve our future endeavors by working on several areas. First, to see "real" culture

should be our ultimate goal. Unfortunately, most of us tend to see and process new places on a tourist level. Worst of all, our isolation from the general population further hampered our desires to look beyond surface conditions. Hence, in the future, we may invite some local guests or have some small-group discussion sessions to help us discover "internals of culture", such as cultural structure, cultural thought patterns and logic, and cultural relationships.

Secondly, we should learn to work on "adaptability". Emotions blind us quickly, especially when frustration and emotional tensions are high anyway because of our arrival in a new culture. However, in many circumstances, we should learn to suspend judgement and listen to local people, including their different ways of communication patterns, accented and not so fluent English, and their paces of life. We should treat cultural differences as a resource and that was the reason why we traveled thousands of miles to experience the cross-cultural differences firsthand. Further, it is important for us to keep in mind that people deeply appreciate the efforts we take to relate to their world-- a world for them identified by their language, cultural patterns, logic and interaction modes. Maybe we should start learning some basic conversation or greeting in our host-country language (i.e., language drill) before we take off.

Finally, seminars or/and forums instead of lectures should be planned

for our trip. It would be good for us to get access to our speakers' notes ahead of time, so we can be ready for question-probing and information-seeking. Emphases should be placed on transactional processes of learning and discussing among interactants rather than mostly one-way preaching or reporting from speakers. We should be offered opportunities to develop curiosities about the internals of culture by being engaged in thinking and analyzing our speakers' notes critically in order to utilize their knowledge and information to foster our abilities for text analysis and pedagogical purposes.
