

POST-TRIP PRESENTATIONS OPENING REPORT

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With irresistible joy and pride, I present to you in-progress works produced by the students of the second-year Chinese class on their March 2004 TRIP to China. This co-curricular event spanned over the students' entire Spring Break, beginning at 6am of Friday, March 12 in front of the Crozier-Williams College Center. When the whole group returned to this same spot near midnight two weeks later, extensively traveled but healthy, safe and sound, all the five language and cultural TRIP's conducted by the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures in the past four years—three to China, and two to Japan—came to a noteworthy close. With Freeman Foundation's most generous funding behind them, along with the knowledgeable support from the College's National and International Office and virtually around-the-clock guidance and supervision from six faculty leaders, a total of 43 first- or second-year language class students participated in this program, and benefited enormously from it. In each TRIP, students engaged themselves in action-packed, frequently on-the-go itineraries, visiting cultural sites, performing language tasks, practicing unfamiliar social roles, reuniting with alumni, attending briefings, classes, performances and ceremonies, and always trying their best to comply with the Chinese- or Japanese-only language rule—all these formed the defining characteristics of EALC's language and cultural TRIP's. By accumulating hands-on experience as such in the Far Eastern land, students in the end witnessed in themselves improved language skills and broadened cultural perspectives. As heartily as I would like to congratulate them on their remarkable achievements, there is however no time, not even on this occasion of recuperation and reflection, for such celebratory acts. For those who have overcome the first few hurdles of Chinese and Japanese studies, the reason is simple: the trips may have ended, but the journey continues.

All students that went on East Asian TRIPs were required to complete follow-up assignments. Varying from year to year, these might include essay questions to answer in the assessment package, a daily journal or a thank-you letter to submit, an oral exam to take, a slide show to present to the campus community, or a comprehensive final project to accomplish. All participants had the obligation to enroll in at least one more year of language courses on the next level. Throughout their college life, TRIP alumni committed themselves to promoting a greater awareness of and interest in East Asia among their peers, and sharing their experience with future participants eager to face the same challenge. (This year, one of the 2001 China TRIP alumni was selected to be the group's assistant and played the role of the student leader brilliantly.) Regarding their academic career, TRIP students drew upon the information and resources they gathered during travel time to better prepare themselves for their upcoming Study Away semester/year, the planning of their East Asia-related majors, potential CISLA internships, and post-graduation academic or professional opportunities in China or Japan. The TRIP only brought them to Mecca for no longer than three weeks, but the pilgrims never ceased the quest, and have always returned to find the strength and stimulus they need for the continuing pursuit of their life goals.

Upon returning from China and Japan, TRIP leaders could not sit relaxed and left the event behind, either. In addition to the comprehensive budget and assessment reports they had to file, pedagogy of TRIP courses had to be examined and improved, student projects called for timely advising, and there were always the concern with the strengthening of our relations with the many host institutions, the enrichment of East Asian cultural life on campus, and funding security. Many a groundbreaking project was thus initiated and accomplished, which, to summarize, include Prof. Amy Dooling's submission of a grant proposal to endow the TRIP component to CHI 102; the re-use of the nine 2001 language practica into the CHI 201 syllabus; mounting visual images to situationalize vocabulary presentation and pattern drills in CHI 202; upgrade of CHI 202 to Writing Enhanced in 2003; hosting Shanghai University Delegation in April 2002; the design of two TRIP galleries and the launch of Erich Archer's '03 China Video in the Department webpage; the holding of Ms. Kobayashi's Japanese Tea Ceremony and

Workshop in 2004; etc. As labor-intensive as they were, these post-TRIP designs and activities helped students stay connected to the horizon that had just broadened in front of them, and extended the educational effect of the many TRIP events to our home base.

But what will most likely continue to inspire and empower us, students and faculty alike, may be the impact visiting these two unique East Asian countries has left us on the personal level. And this impact may not even settle in until years later. After all, going on a class trip to the other side of the planet is itself a task daunting enough, not to mention trying to make sense of today's most rapidly modernizing ancient civilization and second largest global economy in less than three weeks by speaking their languages. And I believe that it is through these otherworldly, dazzling, and sometimes baffling and frustrating experiences that we can instigate the deepest type of soul-searching and self-discovery. Regarding China--my parents' homeland but a place I did not grow up in, blending in properly and accepting the prescribed social norms but keeping part of myself intact had been the philosophy of my way of action there. When I applied this principle this year to queuing in line for store service this year, it often meant waiting passively and seeing my turn being deprived by interceptive fellow customers.

Then there came this Thursday afternoon when I found myself in a post office off Beijing's Wangfujing Boulevard trying all I could to speed up the process of mailing out a hefty package so that I could reunite with the rest of the group in time. When it seemed almost certain that my turn, which was the next one to call, would be cut again, I decided not to yield anymore but asserted my position to the man who was approaching the counter with his oversize package in hand. Seeing my challenge, this middle-age man simply motioned me to the one-foot space left between me and the counter and returned the ritual matter-of-factly, “ 站近點兒 ! ”, which means “Get closer then!” His understated tone suddenly enlightened me on why I often lost my turn in government offices or stores: people might not think I was actually waiting to be served! Leaving a space in line, as it turned out, was not considered a civic gesture but a social deviation in this bustling country, one that was bound to contribute to ubiquitous business slowdown if fervently observed. I left the post office embarrassed by my own outsider's anomaly,

but was undeniably elated at my newfound dimension of behavioral liberty, which I promise myself to lavish during my future trips back there. Is there any price to pay, you might wonder? Now I do begin to worry if this lesson in social behavior would prompt me to gradually abandon the 2-second safety rule for moving vehicles back in Connecticut that I have always tried to observe when driving in the notorious I-95!

I am glad that for quite the foreseeable future I will have this dearly felt experience to chronicle my personal growth. And of course those anxious late night hours on March 20th waiting in front of the hotel TV but not getting a word of the result of Taiwan's presidential election would also be vividly remembered. Once again, it's story-telling time!

Today's presentation session was designed to be a preview of the oral part of each TRIP participant's 30-minute long final project to be given all in Chinese in the last day of classes. To assure unobstructed comprehension tonight, each student will provide English translation to her slides and answer the audience's question. The event will proceed following our itinerary, from the Northern land onwards to the three cities in the Yangtze River Delta. We will begin with Rachel Mandell's & Emily Bassin's & works on Beijing. Following them, Johnny Benton will report on his observations and findings in Nanjing. The garden city Suzhou was the third city that we visited, which will be highlighted by Petra Kovacevic and Diana Sweet. Ly Ding's and Kirsten Pflomm's portrays of Shanghai will go last. Appended to these will be Wang Weiwei's introduction to the two minority cities Kunming and Hohhot that she had personally visited before, which were not covered in our trip. In conclusion, Eric Schluessel will reflect on his two rounds of participation in East Asian Languages and Cultures' China TRIP program, first as a beginning-level student and now a 400-level Chinese student assistant. And those gourmet feasters in the audience should not miss the food and drinks prepared by Groton's Wokery restaurant this evening, of which the steamed buns with bean paste and mixed vegetable stuffing (i.e., 包子 bāozi) succeeded in turning this China group into insatiable eaters since their discovery of them midway through the trip!