

### 3 China students talk long, much

January 13, 2012 by Daniel J. Bauer

Last week I focused on a published interview with the author of “Taiwan Could be Better,” a new book (in Chinese) by a Taiwan National University graduate student from China, Fu Tzun-fong. Much of that column was political in nature.

Today’s column is the result of a conversation I had last week with three of my current students from China. That conversation lasted nearly two hours. Liza Doolittle could have danced all night in “My Fair Lady,” but I swear my three young friends could have talked all night. Enjoying their vivacious personalities was easy. The pleasure of their company was also exhausting for a young lad like myself.

Two of the interviewees are exchange students now finishing a single semester at my university. Soon they will return to China. The third student, a Sophomore, plans to complete her four-year program on time to graduate from my university.

We centered on politics only in our final minutes together. My main goal was to get my Three Musketeers talking on personal experience and a blend of life-style and cross-cultural issues.

The students here for one semester said I could use their English names. Thank you, Candy and Pamela (hereafter “C” and “P”). The Sophomore preferred not to have her name appear. I will call her Anne (“A”).

I asked the one-semester students if anything in Taiwan had surprised them. They described how flabbergasted they were when their professors whipped out detailed syllabuses and distributed them in their first week of class. This is not the custom in China.

C said that, just off the plane, she was disappointed in the lackluster scenery along the highway. She had expected a more sophisticated landscape. When she later got to know Taipei’s business district, she felt more at home. “I found that Taiwan really does have its own beauty.”

P and C both were impressed with the choices they

had here. P was so impressed with them that she feels she went overboard. Wanting to take advantage of as many precious electives in language and literature as possible, she tried to swallow 29 credits. “I really regret this now” (“hen hou hui!”). C said her university does not offer real electives. “It’s a bit like high school,” she said. Both laughed while speaking of Taiwanese saying to them, “With all the great universities in China, why did you come to Taiwan to study?” They agreed with A that the adventure, if at times painful, has been rich and rewarding.

Professors are more reluctant to fail students in China than they are here, said C and P. They dropped their jaws at the notion that a university would expel students for poor academic performance. “How else are professors different?” I asked. C, P and A agreed that teachers on our campus want students to express themselves. C indicated she didn’t want to push the point too strongly, but professors back home seem to want students to think independently, but teach with high school-like methods that discourage creativity.

P and C said Taiwan students tend to be more lax in class than their counterparts in China. Students do not come late in China. Professors arrive early. Taiwan students tend to stay up later than students in China, and care more for their appearance. C expressed surprise at male students who use cosmetics or wear their hair in exotic styles. C and P covered their mouths with their hands and giggled when sharing reactions to students of “neutral gender” (“chung hsing”). This is much rarer in China than it is in today’s Taiwan.

The students said Taiwan’s media present China in negative terms and are nearly comical in their obsession with unimportant local events. They said no one mentions the “Tienanmen” (“liu sz”) event in public. “Fa lun gung,” they insisted, is a totally evil philosophical-spiritual group. There is plenty of freedom in China. Incredibly open social networks are booming by the minute.

Space limitations force me to end here. I am grateful for these interesting and hard-working student friends. Good luck in your exams this week, C, P and A. May all go well for you. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor at Fu Jen Catholic University.)