

Time to examine conscience on foreigner treatment

November 1., 2015, By Daniel J. Bauer

Personal experience has taught me that phrasing words on sensitive topics in a 2nd language is a form of hell. You can get burned easily.

An article in The China Post this past week, written not by its staffers, but by a local news agency, carried this title: "Sending children abroad to study appeals to parents: poll" (10-28-15 p. 16). The piece consisted of only 5 paragraphs. This suggests the author was reporting on a more or less superficial level. This does not mean, however, the article was unimportant.

The report opens with the news that in a recent survey, seventy-five percent of the parents among 300 local families with at least one child under the age of 23 "will consider sending their children abroad for a university education . . ."

What "will consider" means is not clear. A native speaker is likely to wonder if the writer simply means "consider." Why attach a future time marker to the statement, unless, of course, the actual meaning is that according to the survey, a great majority of parents here await a moment still ahead and, at that time, "will consider" in what place they prefer their "children" (another possible language issue) to attend a university?

Phrases in the article are consistently "iffy," and include "where they would be willing to send their children to study" and "indicated that they would like to."

So, fine: life is full of possibilities, and study abroad is one of them and, yes, language is often sensitive.

The report leaves us with an intriguing question hovering in the clouds above. Should (some, or all) Taiwanese families send their "children" to foreign universities? Is it right for them to do that?

Last Sunday's column gave voice to several of my former students on the controversial birth of a Taiwanese baby on an airplane bound for Los Angeles. We recall that the mother, who deceived authorities before the flight about the length of her pregnancy, was refused entry to the USA. The child, born in American air space, was granted American citizenship.

A Canadian citizen who has lived in Taiwan for 13 years and is married to a local Taiwanese woman wrote in response to that column. A few of his very straight-from-the-shoulder words deserve quotation.

"Dear Father Bauer . . . The majority of Taiwanese think it is perfectly acceptable to board a flight to Canada or the USA to have a child there. Some say it is a form of 'insurance' for their children in the event of a takeover of Taiwan . . . by mainland China . . . Others say it is to avoid paying future 'foreign' tuition prices at Canadian or American universities that are often far superior than (those) in Taiwan . . . for which they or their family members have contributed few or no taxes to support."

The gentleman went on to remind me that Taiwan grants dual citizenship for its citizens, but denies it to foreigners. "No children born to foreigners in Taiwan are permitted ROC citizenship." After raising this topic with "many Taiwanese," he says, "almost all have had the same opinion . . . Taiwanese should not tolerate foreigners (doing) in Taiwan what they (themselves) are doing" in Canada or the USA.

A few summary questions are in order.

- 1) Dilemmas that are ethically sensitive (Is it right? Is it fair?) arise in all places. In a recent conversation with me, a student compared birth tourism in the USA with similar situations in her home town, Hong Kong. It is common knowledge some mainland Chinese cross the border there to give birth in local hospitals for the sake of special benefits. 2) How proud can some Taiwanese be of playing tricks with immigration laws to dodge costly tuition bills? 3) As human rights issues deservedly cry out to us on a daily basis, isn't it more than time for the ROC to examine its conscience on how it treats foreigners serving our local society? 4) What is so wrong with our local universities, private and public, that scads of parents dream of foreign countries for the education of their college-aged children, rather than Taiwan?

I can't seem to get out of my head the remark of still another student to me this past week, "Maybe the moon over there really is rounder than here in Taiwan?" (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points

- 1) A Canadian who has lived in Taiwan for 13 years read last week's column on page 4 of the China Post and wants readers to know more of how Taiwan treats foreigners (unfairly). How many foreigners in Taiwan do you personally know? What is your impression of "foreigners in Taiwan"? Are they happy?
- 2) The letter writer specifically complains about 'birth tourism' as it may affect the cost of tuition in Canadian or American universities. Once upon a time it was very common for Taiwan students to study for Ph.D. degrees in foreign countries. Popularity for study abroad has changed now, however. Why do some in Taiwan (or China) want to study in western countries? Are their reasons reasonable?
- 3) If so many Taiwanese want to study abroad, is there something wrong with Taiwan universities? Why this fascination, this desire, this thirst for foreign education?

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