

China shines in Taiwan classrooms

Sunday, October 21, 2012
By Daniel J. Bauer

Making comparisons is always a risky undertaking. The old adage not to compare apples with oranges makes a lot of sense. It is hard to argue against that advice. Apples and oranges may both be fruits, but that's about all they have in common.

It is with bated breath and wobbly knees then that I step out onto a limb to make this pairing. Perhaps it is impossible to compare college students from China with college students born and bred in Taiwan, but I would like to try.

From the beginning, let us put aside some sensitivities. Our students from China carry passports that confirm their country as The People's Republic of China (PRC). Taiwan students can show passports that represent their identity with what they and presumably most of us in this niche of the world believe to be another country, popularly and existentially known as Taiwan, which has never been a part of the PRC. Passports designate nationality.

The China Post ran an article last week in cooperation with our local magazine Commonwealth. The piece was entitled "Taiwan profs become marketers as enrollment worries mount." It appeared October 15 on pages 5 and 6.

Most of that article did not focus on China. The article argued that our decline in population in recent decades and our proliferation of universities have practically put a gun to the head of higher education in Taiwan. The problem is complex, and requires courage, imagination, and a lot of sweat to solve. The problem may be insoluble. Perhaps within 15 years, a full third of our current universities will be closed. We won't have enough students to keep them running.

The article points to China as a possible source of relief, if not rescue. More than 400 students from China are now studying in Taiwan in short-term curricula. An additional group is here for entire 4-year university bachelor degree programs. Some are in our graduate institutes. The Ministry of Education (MOE) stipulates that the number of these imported students from China may not exceed 1 per cent of our university population. Thus, about 2,000 students from China are, at this time, the limit.

Is it possible our Chinese students can influence their Taiwanese classmates? I mean, in a personal way?

Although our young friends from China may not have an appreciable statistical impact on our institutional and economical woes, might they still contribute in positive ways in our departments and classrooms?

If I include the Chinese students I have recently taught with those I am teaching now, I suppose I can number them at about 20. For years I have taught about 250 students a week. It may be apples and oranges but, over all, the Chinese students - - without exception - - have set themselves apart as equal to or superior to the best of their Taiwanese counterparts.

These words I write bring me no special joy. I fear they will win me no favor among young friends I dearly treasure.

My Chinese students by and large are over-achievers. They turn in longer assignments than required, are rarely late for class, do not cut classes, tend to sit near the front of the room, and are avid note-takers. For the most part, my Chinese students do not fool around with electronic devices in class or gab with friends when someone else is talking. My Chinese students are clearly hungry for knowledge and self-improvement.

The great majority of my Taiwanese students are equally as sharp in their EQ and classroom decorum. The majority is equally as accomplished in skills for analysis and communication.

The problem is that a troubling number of my local students lack the fire in their bellies to push themselves as hard as their classmates from China push themselves. A far higher percentage of our "imports" are working more than their peers from Taiwan.

A university ought to be a microcosm of the world, giving opportunities to educators and students of many kinds and stripes to meet, rub shoulders together, and learn from one another. Universities can and should be places where comparisons push all of us, me included, to be better today than we were yesterday. (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points:

1. This column offers a comparison between students at Fu Jen who come from China and students who are born and bred here in Taiwan. Is it possible to compare whole groups of students like this? Is it fair to compare Chinese with Taiwanese students?
2. The author tries very hard to point out that the great majority of Taiwanese students are serious about education and are responsible and courteous in class. Does the column seem balanced and fair to you? Does it view China's students too positively?
3. How can you improve yourself as a student and person these current weeks? Do you feel you push yourself hard enough already? Are there areas in your student or personal life where you are "hungry for a change"?

**本文章僅供讀書會參考使用，非經原作者同意，請勿任意轉載。

師生互動與社會關懷
專欄讀書會