

# Differentiate Through Christ-Centered International Business Travel

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**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this paper is to stimulate educators to consider methods in which global business travel with students can be more meaningful, productive, and culturally enriching — both for business students and also for the international communities visited. From a Christian perspective, ideas are shared on the need to understand diverse cultures and to overcome ethnocentrism — a prerequisite for doing business anywhere. Methods are suggested for achieving profound results in international travel with business students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Christian colleges and universities have a strategic opportunity to differentiate from other institutions through Christ-centered international travel, not merely globe-trotting as “educational travel agents,” but as God’s ambassadors “to the ends of the earth.” Stories of the “ugly American,” spoiled students, loud intruders, harried businesspeople and other negative perceptions abound regarding Americans traveling abroad. Given this backdrop, over the years, I have attempted to focus my travel on what I deeply believe should be the manner in which we lead students in the international business world, as Christians, loving God and others, and always maintaining academic rigor.

Four primary travel/business goals developed with student input, help keep this focus and drive everything from student selection to final evaluations. When the goals are adhered to, the results are God-pleasing and satisfying to all involved. Rather than the “4 P’s” of marketing, they are the “4 C’s” of business/travel. The travel must be:

(1) Christ-honoring — making Christ the priority, in everything, beginning with student selection, pre-trip planning, the actual travel, and post-trip unwrapping. This is the underpinning of the entire journey. Prayer partners start to pray for the team and the locals whom we will encounter. Before the trip begins,

Scripture is the resource used on a daily basis to solve problems, give thanks, and identify opportunities. Without a Christ focus, it is merely a sight-seeing trip with familiar students and academics. Christ makes it life-changing at a deep level.

(2) Culturally connecting — reaching out to understand, interact with, and give service to cultures/businesses visited. Most business activities today are global in scope. Every company is international to the extent that its performance is impacted by events that happen abroad. Asia is a popular destination for businesses seeking to expand and enter new markets. China and India, with populations exceeding two billion, need to be understood. Their infrastructures, economic conditions, political environments, competitive impacts, but in particular, the socio-cultural forces vitally need to be comprehended in order to conduct any type of business or have any hope of a Christian impact. One of the primary obstacles to cultural understanding is a person’s self-reference to his or her own cultural values. Bringing students out to experience and begin to understand a culture is a challenge. It is conducted through an “others orientation” approach, that is, setting up personal local encounters, ensuring that where students stay affords real-life cultural interactions, teaming students with

foreign students while traveling, establishing site visits for maximum experiential learning, participating at local restaurants, etc. with local companions, and always committing to a tithing of time to do service work in order to contribute to the communities visited. The goal is to experience what locals experience and foreigners rarely do. The focus on connecting with locals provides opportunities for witnessing (i.e., heart, hand, and head connections), even in countries that may not be friendly toward Christianity.

(3) Cognitively enriching — researching and studying subject matter, visiting sites and actively participating with locals as a learning tool. Compromising academics for the sake of Christ is not God-honoring; in fact, it is just the opposite. Being sensitive to God's commands improves the intellectual enterprise, enriches the experience, and rightly transforms the individual. Most professors focus on academics. It is the most obvious endeavor because there are books, company site visits, and speakers, etc. that are accessible. Purposeful travel, in addition, focuses on the experiential or the "go do" rather than "go see." The country is the classroom, and much of the "book studying" is done before the trip begins and also upon return.

(4) Community building — developing supportive relationships with each travel team member, including the professor. Students generally will "hang out" with their friends and go no further. In purposeful travel, student relationships are developed very deliberately, with all members of the travel team. Professors help students connect with each other, emphasizing Christ-like characteristics. Scripture serves as the basis to help develop character and implement wise student choices. This helps to create meaningful friendships, ensure acceptance, and increase bonds among members of the team. Students are encouraged to support and watch out for each other, thus increasing student responsibility and facilitating lifelong social and business networks. It is an "others orientation." For example, pre-trip books and articles are cited for students, giving them practical tips on developing cooperation; students spend at least one-half day traveling with each member of the team, discovering their background; activities are conducted for getting to know each other and for role-playing potentially stressful cultural and social/business situations; prayer partners and scripture leaders are assigned; teams are formed for cultural sharing of Christian traditions abroad;

and gift teams are formed, etc. All such activities are applicable to business settings and witnessing.

When these goals are the focus, it is reflected not only in the evaluations of students and their evaluations of the experience but, more importantly, in far-reaching student business attitudes, actions, understandings, and changed lives. In addition, cultures visited gain an appreciation of Christians. The results of obeying God are deep, lasting, and meaningful, and the learning is rich. It revolves around people and culture, not just sites and facts. Instead of chasing fun and adventure for its own sake, it is "connecting" as a means of absorbing information and learning. James says to believe God's commands, and yet to not act upon them is a sure sign of a dead faith (James 2:17). We are to live out our faith. Many institutions employ excellent practices when sending business students abroad. It is the responsibility of Christian institutions, however, to use this opportunity to serve God and keep him at the center of the international travel experience.

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate educators to consider methods in which global business and travel with students can be more meaningful, productive, and culturally enriching — for both students and the international communities. From a Christian perspective, ideas will be shared on the need to understand diverse cultures and overcome ethnocentrism — a prerequisite for doing business anywhere — and practical methods will be suggested for achieving profound results.

Students must be prepared to work in the world of globalization. Professors need to help them improve their ability to adapt and deal with individuals, firms, and authorities in foreign countries. Students should be encouraged to develop humility, knowledge of countries, relationships with others, adaptability, and cultural understanding through an "others orientation." The international arena is an ideal environment to cultivate Christ-like characteristics in students. It is incumbent upon professors not only to introduce students to other countries but to bring faith into business studies and travel. Christ wants us to go forth and spread the Gospel. To travel internationally and study business with Christ honoring, cooperative, cognitively enriching, and culturally competent goals is a gift we to bring to our students.

## STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

Global expansion has become a strategic imperative for almost any medium- to large-size corporation. This global-

ization is necessary if companies are to remain knowledgeable of market developments and global customers, gain possible global scales of efficiencies, and protect against global competitors. Everything from research, production, distribution, marketing and communications contain a global dimension, and every company is international because its performance is impacted by events that happen abroad.

Asia, specifically India, is a popular destination for international businesses seeking to expand and enter new markets. Ranging from well-known publications to the cinema, India is presently a popular location. India has the second largest growing economy after China and is creating many new insights to business studies regarding globalization. Investors globally are targeting India's markets. How do businesses begin to understand a country which has over one billion people in a strategically important region, is the world's largest democracy, and has Hindus, Muslims, Christians plus myriad other religions? It is a land of hundreds of dialects and where "only about 11 percent of those eligible to enroll in higher education do so, compared with about 21 percent in the other 'BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries'" (Yee, 2009, para. 8) and "with 40 percent of its population under 18" (Sengupta, 2008, p. A1). India offers strategic opportunities amidst struggles with poverty, disease, extreme water shortages, choking pollution, enormous energy needs, and many challenging infrastructure issues. There are increasing terrorist threats and, to an exaggerated degree it seems, India faces every other issue confronting big emerging nations. Amidst this, India's higher education system is one of the largest in the world, with many premier institutions, particularly in technology.

Turning to China, how is business to understand the other Asian behemoth, "the gorilla," as James McGregor put it in *One Billion Customers*? There are many perplexities to try to comprehend: a 5,000-year old history, a political system with no opposition parties and little public debate on issues, employment with no trade unions, a media that underpins social control, universities whose students are the 20 percent of 18- to 30-year-olds rigorously selected to enroll, plus a single institution in Beijing alone which has more than 4,000 "think tank" researchers (Leonard, 2008). China's modern history includes foreign policy issues (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, Tibet, and North Korea) and many internal challenges, such as infrastructure development, intellectual property law, pollution, religious freedom, policing the Internet, and the one-child policy, to name a few.

## ADAPTATION TO CULTURE FOR BUSINESS AND THE GOSPEL

Two essential goals of international business are to maximize the returns while minimizing the risks. Using international marketing as an example, and realizing that corporate resources and competencies influence strategic choice (Verbke, 2003), the marketing manager controls price, product, promotion, and channels-of-distribution, in order to maximize anticipated demand. These are within a marketer's decision-making area, that is, areas that can be controlled and risk minimized.

Uncontrollable elements, however, present risks that must be carefully considered in order to achieve success. Some of these elements include infrastructure, competitive issues, economic conditions, political influences, regulatory agencies, and socio-cultural forces. These elements differ from country to country and are not under the control of the marketing manager. Therefore, to lessen risks, marketing programs must be designed to make critical adjustments in uncertain business climates.

Local adaptation is required for success in foreign markets. Of all the variables, both controllable and uncontrollable, of conducting successful business globally, cultural understanding is the uncontrollable variable that needs most to be understood. The challenge of the international marketer is to adjust to the culture and recognize its importance. In the home country, cultural adjustment is not a problem, and is done automatically as a result of years of socialization. The risk lies in the foreign market, when adaptation to cultural differences arises.

The primary obstacles to success in international marketing are a person's self-reference criterion (SRC) and an associated ethnocentrism. The SRC is an unconscious reference to one's own cultural values, experiences, and knowledge as a basis for decisions. Closely connected is ethnocentrism, that is, the notion that people in one's own company, culture, or country know best how to do things (Cateora, Gilly, & Graham, 2009, p. 15).

America's economic dominance in the world has at times hindered businesses because of SRC and ethnocentrism — for example, Disney's initial foray into France with the American concept of "Mickey" and Disneyland. Global opportunities abound for those prepared to shed ethnocentric habits. To be globally effective, one must adapt to cultural differences and understand cultural attributes, including beliefs and values shared from one genera-

tion to the next (Tung, 2009). Culture is the like-mindedness within a group of people. If it is not understood, there is little hope of successfully doing business or connecting with the people of the other culture. Adaptation or, at a minimum, accommodation, is critical in international business (Sin, Tse, Yau, Chow, & Lee, 2005). Sympathy for and knowledge of cultural and business practices in a foreign environment can remove seemingly insurmountable barriers and create not only successful business relationships but an opportunity to have a Christian influence. Understanding the culture of a foreign country, its history, family loyalty, politics, religions, sense of time, ways of thinking, etc. greatly impact the potential for doing business globally and connecting locally.

Adaptation to the foreign culture depends on a desire and hard work. Conscientious preparation must be done before business is conducted in the target country. “Cultural empathy” is clearly necessary for anyone hoping to be successful in doing business in the host country. It is a part of the basic orientation of a country, and anyone who is confused about the environment is more than likely not going to be effective (Lee & Dawes, 2005).

Experienced international business people know business customs and expectations of a culture. For example, the Chinese word “guanxi” (Rao, Pearce, & Xin, 2005) refers to friendship, human relations, or attaining a level of trust through friendship (Zaheer & Zaheer, 2006). In China and India, trusting relationships and friendships are imperatives for conducting business. The Chinese accept strangers only after a trust relationship has developed. This is part of their culture. The stranger is an outsider and considered only after family members, extended family, hometown neighbors, and former classmates. Networking through one of these contacts can prove successful if a strong, trusting friendship has been developed.

Any Christian businessperson wishing to work with individuals, the government, or firms should consider developing an attitude of tolerance, flexibility, cultural curiosity, a caring about others, and a general “others orientation” or a focus on the interests of others, which will help in adapting and integrating into the host culture. These qualities seem obvious in conducting successful relationships anywhere, but the obvious is often forgotten.

Embracing the culture is indispensable when conducting business and representing Christ in Asia. To understand the culture, both study and interaction are imperative.

## DIFFERENTIATE — THE VALUE ADDED

University-sponsored international travel for business students has grown at an extraordinary pace. Many national agencies have also developed programs to encourage students to travel abroad. Stories, however, regarding the character of demanding students, loud intruders, insulting cultural invaders, harried foreigners, and other negative perceptions abound regarding student travel. Youth tourism is rapidly becoming another mass-consumption product that is often little more than student sight-seeing vacations with friends and exhausted professors trying to protect the students from themselves and others. There has been a “McDonaldizing” of trips, where the emphasis is on fast travel with oversized itineraries. Bringing business students with limited budgets out to experience a culture, at all levels, is a significant challenge. If, however, understanding culture and minimizing one’s own self-reference perspectives is critical to successfully conducting international business and representing Christians in a positive manner, then Christian educators must consider methods through which global travel with business students can be more meaningful, productive, culturally enriching, and God-honoring — not only for students, and to enhance our universities’ reputations — but also for the international communities visited. Important cultural methodological frameworks provide insight and must be reviewed — including cultural theorists such as Frons Trompenaas (e.g., levels of affect), Geert Hofstede’s research to identify value dimensions of varying cultures (e.g., uncertainty avoidance), and Edward Hall’s study of cross-cultural issues (e.g., “high context” and “low context” communication). Intercultural studies need to be understood as part of international preparedness (Bennett, 1993). Other methods, however, provide culturally enriching understanding at a personal level and include experiential lessons gained during travel with students. Practical methods using directed cultural interaction through firsthand experiences are indispensable for helping students overcome ethnocentrism, develop networks, understand cultural etiquette, realize the multiple aspects of both uncontrollable and controllable variables of doing business, and basically improve their overall cultural competence — prerequisites for doing good business anywhere. It also forms the foundation for opportunities to share one’s faith. This can be achieved, and profound travel results gained, through these experiential practices, thereby better preparing business students for work in the global marketplace and also improving student reputations as Christian global travelers. Many educational institutions have become globe-trotting,

logistics-specializing, educational travel agents, whose students do not penetrate or comprehend the nuances of culture, but move from city site to city site, visiting businesses, enjoying restaurants, checking into hotels, then moving on to the next target to do the same. But it is through deliberate and loving contact with locals that our understanding and discernment of a culture begins to take place. Businesses know there is nothing like experience, and experience gained through mutually beneficial cultural interactions is invaluable. Christian universities and colleges have a strategic opportunity and responsibility to differentiate their travel programs through meaningful and culturally sensitive, people-enriching, Christ-centered experiential international travel.

### COMMUNITY BUILDING WITHIN THE TRAVEL TEAM

Someone once said, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” This could not be truer when preparing to travel with students representing Christ. In laying the groundwork, there must be time to cultivate the hearts and minds of students for cultural encounters and opportunities they will have during their travel. Thoughtful preparation is essential and will eliminate a multitude of later problems. It begins by creating a culture — an attitude of serving, or an “others orientation” within the team. The essence is a focus on the other person through Christian love — being sincerely interested in them and giving personal time to find out about their talents, their history, and their passions. It is a practice, or dry run, for the team before they venture out to focus on the people and places they will visit. Without this “others orientation” and Christ-like attitude, which is the antithesis of our more natural ego-centric bent and of seeking self-gratification, students will not be able to escape their own self-reference habits and connect with the culture visited let alone with their own travel team members. It is a viewing of the world as far as “What’s in it for others?” and not just “What’s in it for me?” This is particularly important in Asia since the cultures are so vastly different from ours and from each other, and travel can be challenging. Both in India and China, relationships are everything. Asians want to do business with individuals they know, and trust and there is little chance of witnessing unless this happens.

So trust begins at home, with each other — getting to know each other and developing an “others” focus for the team and beginning to imagine the international community. It helps if there are students familiar with this orientation from previous classes. The initial stage in developing

the team’s ability might be what William Howell calls the first of four levels of cultural awareness or “unconscious incompetence,” not knowing what you do not know about a culture. It might also be what he considers the second level of cultural awareness, which is “conscious incompetence,” or awareness that you are learning new skills and knowledge and will make mistakes (Howell, 1982).

Activities that have worked particularly well in preparing students and have received positive reviews from students include:

- Students are given articles and practical, common-sense books to read on simple but profound human relations skills. Sometimes the obvious is the most difficult to put into practice. Interestingly, the students who get along best with other students are the ones most enthused by these materials. I have yet to have a student who actually read the material not comprehend its value. A classic, widely used book is Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It is a favorite among students, having sold millions of copies since its publication decades ago, and it is still being used in training conferences for thousands of businesspeople. There are, however, many sources including wonderful Christian authors from which to choose. Students select chapters/articles that resonate with them, present this to the team, and then lead a discussion involving situations that could arise in a foreign country. They might give an “ugly American” ethnocentric response to a situation, then ask the team for alternative, “other-oriented,” Christian approaches. For example, a tourist might refer to a “foreigner” by saying, “Why are they so slow?” or “What kind of an outfit is that?” or “Don’t they speak English?” The focus is on assisting the team to become more flexible and loving to other cultures, to develop an interest in understanding others, and to anticipate cultural situations in which students might need help. Students discuss expectations of what constitutes a good or a poor trip and the responsibilities of team members and the professor in contributing to a positive experience. A contract that students and accompanying professor develop regarding behaviors can enhance the trip. Topics such as maintaining a positive attitude, respecting schedules, promptly informing each other of concerns, supporting team members, and engaging in only healthful and safe activities might be in the contract so that each team member understands his or her personal responsibility and contribution in making the journey a success for all.

- Indian or Chinese students from local colleges are invited to a simple, potluck lunch or dinner held at a home or at the university. Universities usually have clubs or other organizations through which international contacts can be made. This includes sharing typical American foods (usually pizza), and the guests have the option of bringing a sample of their favorite home food. Typically the guests bring more food than expected and also present unexpected gifts — cultural lessons! The “foreigners” love the event. Many times it is their first invitation to an American home or from an American student — another cultural lesson. Not much entertainment is needed because conversations abound; however, taking turns drawing cultural questions from a hat is a fun and culturally informative activity. Questions might include: What are your favorite family memories, traditions, holidays, and music? Almost always, faith conversations arise. This activity is a great success generating friendships, exchange of email addresses, and tips about where to go and what to do. During this simple activity, the transformation of student attitudes begins in earnest. These are Asian students from whom they receive invaluable advice before, during, and even after their trip.
- An inexpensive contact notebook is begun, including a picture on individual pages of each team member and additional pages for potential international travel contacts. The first step is to learn the names of each person on the travel team. This is done as a team through humorous association name games, emphasizing team building. In the small notebook, each student records, on an ongoing basis, observations about their teammates. Emphasis is placed on what is most appreciated about each person: their passions, business strengths, business contacts, talents, things teammates have in common, etc. Students are also required to spend the equivalent of one-half day during travel with each member on the team. They record in their notebooks the answers to pre-developed questions they will weave into conversations with each other. This activity not only helps to break up cliques and to facilitate new friendships, but also increases conversation skills, moves the focus to “others,” and expands student networks of relatives and friends that potentially include hundreds of invaluable local and international business contacts.
- A pretest is given regarding cultural attitudes, and a follow-up test upon return can help measure cultural attitude changes. These results can be shared with the students. The test might be developed by either the instructor or the students. In addition, there are professionally developed surveys that test cultural biases, understanding, etc. It can also be used to measure how a student views his or her spiritual growth during the trip.
- One of the first and most effective activities conducted as a team for bonding and building trust is to have students sit in a circle and share something unique — something no one else might know but is specific to the individual. They can do this verbally or draw a picture or have a teammate represent them. The activity is not about bragging but being vulnerable and sharing something personally quirky. The vulnerability gets the students laughing and lets them break down their guard, especially when the professor starts by sharing that she is profoundly color blind and has extremely flat feet. They then want her shoes to come off and proceed to quiz her on colors of everything in sight. It becomes comical! This activity also helps to identify personality types and learning styles, which can be important information while traveling, particularly in finding leaders and followers, and in pairing students for activities.
- Role playing, experience sharing, and hearing guest speakers help students shed their ethnocentrism and increase their understanding of cultures. Additionally, articles/books are read regarding the countries visited, potential situations students might encounter, and then they are discussed, e.g., how to react to unidentifiable delicacies in China, culturally sensitive locations like religious temples, and the begging of the poor in India. Students usually need and appreciate help with appropriate responses to the myriad of cultural interactions they will experience. A relevant example of cultural assumptions made from an ethnocentric point of view occurred several years ago. A well-intentioned travel team brought trunks full of teddy bears wrapped in white paper to an orphanage in a remote town in China, only to discover that the children had never seen stuffed bears and were frightened by them. Even worse, in China the white of the wrapping paper symbolizes death! Because of the importance of gift-giving in Asia, a gift-giving team is appointed to gather inexpensive yet meaningful gifts for hosts, and to wrap them appropriately for the country visited. Examples of gifts would be “Love MN” pins, college t-shirts for students, samples of American

make-up for girls in Korea (though not in China), pens, paperweights, etc. Teams are also formed to gather traditional American holiday and event items and pictures (e.g., weddings, Christmas, Thanksgiving) to assist in sharing home culture and Christianity when abroad. Students are encouraged to consider their own traditions, which help them realize the significance of traditions in other countries. The visuals gathered beforehand are useful when interacting with foreign hosts during cultural exchange activities and panel discussions, which we initiate, particularly at universities.

There are many other ideas, such as asking Indian or Chinese students and friends to speak to the team, meeting for dinner at an ethnic restaurant and having the owners explain etiquette, watching a popular or historic movie as a team highlighting the country to be visited, meeting in small groups to discuss their fears and hopes for the travel, gathering in pairs for prayer on a regular basis before and during the trip, printing business-sized cards with travel prayer requests to give to family and friends, and meeting with individual students and the trip leader to discuss any special circumstances, strengths, or weaknesses, etc. The key is to focus on Christ, start to build understanding of culture, and to bond with each other before the pressures of travel take over.

### **CULTURALLY CONNECTING — “OTHERS ORIENTED”**

In Milton J. Bennett’s model of intercultural sensitivity, he investigated attitudes and degrees of awareness toward cultural differences. He stated that cultural understanding and sensitivity, including the view that cultural differences are interesting, positive, and have their own logic, is obtained through a process of education and experience (Bennett, 1993). It is the intentionally Christian, “others oriented,” intercultural experiential aspect of international travel with business students that is the focus of this paper. Understanding culture is crucial to conducting business and connecting with people. People, if given the choice, do business with people they like. The same holds true for witnessing. The importance of cultural sensitivity must be communicated to students.

There are so many cultural imperatives that unless meaningful connections with hosts in the country visited are made, the chances of “getting it right” and also being forgiven when mistakes are made are slim. In his book, *Participant Observation*, James Spradley related that to

increase our own cultural knowledge, we need to get inside the heads of the host nationals. This is difficult, but not impossible, especially if it is intentionally experiential and interactive. Cultural examples regularly encountered by business students in both India and China include some of the following: In Chinese etiquette, there are elaborate, unwritten codes of rules that apply to all aspects of business. It begins with introductions, when someone offers a business card, always with both hands. An afternoon meeting will likely extend to late in the evening, and the Chinese do not like to get the impression you are in a rush to leave. To host a party for Asian contacts is always welcome and is a way of connecting and hearing what is really on the minds of your hosts. “Gestures that seem insignificant on the surface can make or break your efforts in China” (Alexander, 2001, p. 9). Gestures can bond you together with your host. For instance, a new friend as a courtesy will insist on walking you to your means of transportation. Indians also want to spend time getting to know you and developing trust before they will share their real feelings. An entire day might be spent at a host’s house, “just sitting around,” eating and talking leisurely, or an afternoon visit to a local friend’s parent’s home may extend into the night with seemingly nothing planned except just getting to know you.

In both India and China, hierarchical social levels are very important. The status of being a professor in both cultures is an advantage along with longevity, which is respected. Saving face in China is all-important and ensures that dignity and social standing are preserved. Politics is an easy topic of discussion in India, but in China, there are political topics too sensitive or considered impolite to discuss. Scott Seligman, author of the book, *Chinese Business Etiquette: A Guide to Protocol, Manners, and Culture in the People’s Republic of China*, talked about how the Chinese may view a foreign friend as a way to get benefits from a world to which they may not have access. It is the way they have had to operate in the past in a society with limited mobility. Manoj Joshi, in *Passport India*, discussed how Indians do not like to say “no” outright. Sometimes it means “no” and sometimes a “yes” means “no” if there is not follow-up. Both countries have intellectual property rights issues, but in a country with a fledgling legal system, such as China, copyright violations, as well as gifts and bribes, are tricky. Bribery is illegal in both countries, but it is common. It is also whom you know and your network that help in getting things done. For example, once in India after negotiating unsuccessfully for almost an hour with a hotel manager to secure the price of a standard hotel meeting room, an Indian friend of mine

happened to walk in. The manager knew my friend, and the price was immediately waved!

To begin the process of becoming culturally capable, one must understand and be willing to adapt to cultural differences shared by a group of people. Howell categorizes this as the third level of cultural awareness, or “conscious competence,” an awareness and understanding of cultural differences gained through cultural interactions in which you are consciously working at improving your cultural appropriateness (Howell, 1982). Much can be done to improve the intellectual enterprise through textbooks, articles, books, speakers, conferences, site visits, research, tours, etc., and most professors are experts on particular subject matters which are a focus and a necessary learning tool. “Others-oriented” travel, however, also focuses purposefully on connecting personally and meaningfully at a local level with the communities visited. It is a “go do” approach in addition to a “go see” approach. The real-life results from such local, personal connections is the “value added” of this type of travel. Planning includes 1) setting up volunteer activities, 2) ensuring that where students stay affords real-life cultural experience and significant cultural interactions, 3) teaming students with foreign students while traveling, 4) setting up site visits for maximum personal local encounters and interactive learning, and 5) choosing local restaurants and activities accompanied by local companions. Such plans help ensure a more “authentic” cultural experience. The goal is to experience with locals what locals experience and foreigners seldom do. As indicated in students’ chronicles, interviews, and evaluations, this is always the favorite aspect of the trip as such experiences provide opportunities for connections on all levels — intellectually, socially, and particularly at a heart level, even in countries that are not particularly friendly toward the United States. This type of travel also helps form positive impressions of Christians and Americans.

When students lack meaningful purpose in life as in travel, they become self-focused and indulgent, chasing the next new and exciting event or scene. Eventually, this grows tiring. Deep satisfaction is not achieved through satiating student appetites with fun, entertainment, and even knowledge. International travel that is deeply life-changing occurs in a manner that stimulates the heart and positively connects with others. Someone once said that “man would rather spend himself for a cause than live idly in prosperity;” in other words, the good life unfulfilled is not much to strive for. It is an indispensable lesson for students to learn to give something back to a country in exchange for all the benefits derived from traveling in it. As Dr. Karl Menninger said in a speech, when asked what advice he

would give a person who felt a nervous breakdown coming on, his recommendation was to “lock up your house, go across the railway tracks, find someone in need, and do something to help that person” (McMillon, 1999, p. xv). How does volunteer service apply to students? There are times, especially in extremely culturally diverse and stressful locations, where students need to focus on problems other than their own. It is helpful to venture out and lend a hand to others in need. When helping an orphan, the elderly, a street child, etc., life is put into a more thoughtful, mature, and global perspective — a perspective readily admired by others. It certainly applies to what Christ taught us to do, as we “do unto others” or serve the “least.”

Student travel chronicles confirm the significant benefits that “others-oriented, go-do, purposeful” travel offered them. Students personally experience diversity as they interact with people who are different from themselves regarding socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. They gain appreciation for others’ adversities, such as being disabled, poor, uneducated, orphaned, or outcast. Further, they gain understanding how communities and individuals deal with these circumstances. This type of travel gives students a new appreciation and analysis of their own country while observing the pros and cons of other locations in the world. It helps them contemplate their possible vocations and consider how Christian organizations might connect globally in order to help the underprivileged. Most often, this experience is the highpoint of their travel, where they got away from frantic attempts to “see” everything and entered a world of Christ-like “doing” for others.

In living out Christ-focused travel, students are prepared to spend a percentage of time, if for only a day, in pre-planned service to others. At least one, but often many activities (sometimes up to ten percent of the time) are organized so students can contribute to the country visited rather than just absorbing and taking from the culture. The term “ugly American” is dispelled when students focus, at least in part, on serving others rather than themselves or their team friends. It requires a bit of pre-planning, but not much, considering the payoff.

Examples of service activities students benefitted from include:

- Teaching local students English, which can be done almost anywhere, anytime. In China, students go to “The English Corner” on Friday night. Chinese students and other locals gather to meet each other and practice their English language skills. Crowds of 20 or 30 locals will swarm our students asking questions and sharing opinions ranging from poli-



tics to business to consumerism to religion. It is a great way to learn how people feel about the United States, especially, regarding business and the economy. A few Chinese students, businesspeople, or other locals are identified to invite to dinner the following night. I personally met two Chinese friends this way by following up with lunch and their leading an informal tour of their favorite sites the next day. These contacts have become lifelong friends, inviting me to their weddings and also to stay with them in Beijing during the Olympics. This is a great way to network. Ironically, one of these contacts was already a Christian, introduced to faith through a grandmother who was converted through missionaries before the Cultural Revolution.

- Playing with children in orphanages is something my students have done all over China, and in India from a street children's shelter in a back alleyway to rescued children living in the home of an Indian family. Sometimes we bring simple and inexpensive materials to face paint, make handprints on paper plates, and blow up balloons and tie them into animals. With the older children, we play everything from baseball to wrestling to soccer. These youngsters have even taught us cricket. The connections with the local caregivers and the children are profound.

Other volunteer activities have included painting a shelter for the poor, laying paving stones at a children's center in a small city, helping at a home for the elderly, feeding children at a food distribution center, painting signposts for the local mayor, picking up trash in one area of town or where students are staying, singing at a local church or hospital, teaching sports or conducting an art project at a local school, providing business lectures and interactive student learning at a local university, etc. These diverse activities have all been rewarding ways to learn the culture, connect with the people, and gain the respect of businesspeople because we are showing we care for their country. Contacts for these activities were made in the U.S. through religious organizations, businesspeople, adoption agencies, university personnel and foreign students, international business organizations, web searches, travel books, friends, etc. Other times contacts were made simply by emailing a local for information on volunteering or requesting other local contacts who might have ideas. In one instance, we went to a local city official and asked what we could do to serve the town for a day. He had us paint hundreds of posts lining the town road. We wondered how that would help in connecting us. Diligently

we took our provided buckets of white paint and brushes, dressed in orange reflective vests to accomplish the task on a dusty stretch of road, in 90 degree weather! To our surprise, the homeless street children of the town came out to watch, then help us with our Tom Sawyer-type task! The local press noticed our service work and the fun we were having teaching local street children to paint. We ended up on the front page of the local newspaper with the headline: "U.S. Students Serving Our Town." In addition, the BBC was visiting and produced a short documentary on our activity! What tremendous good will that simple activity produced along with connecting our students all over town plus hoisting their spirits and raising them to endeared celebrity level! The lessons learned were many, but most importantly it connected us at a heart level, gave us practically unlimited access in learning the culture, credibility in perusing business contacts, and faith that "God works everything together for good." It was an ordinary task with profound results.

Other examples of connecting culturally with locals include:

- Using local universities or housing close to universities provides several advantages: students can interact with locals their own age, experience what the locals experience, connect with possible future leaders of the country, observe what students eat (we joined students outdoors each morning to experience street vendors cooking puffy dough and selling scalding hot water for tea), participate with their schedule (in China, students rose at 6 a.m. to the sound of their national anthem and then gather in a courtyard for exercises), and observe their dress (we noticed many students wearing the same clothing every day, always clean, but always the same; later we realized they could not afford more than one outfit, and even if they could, there was no place to store it in their limited living space). We learned how to find things we needed at inexpensive local stores, where locals went to relax (parks, zoos, places to dance), customs (such as not showing affection publically which we learned the hard way by giving an uncustomary hug when greeting a friend of the opposite sex), their language (finding it difficult to practice Chinese when they were so enthusiastic to practice their English), etc.
- Pairing up with local university business or other students to visit their favorite local restaurant, sites, and activities. These are the future leaders of China and India — what contacts and insights are gained! Local university contacts are sometimes made in

advance but many times when we arrive. Local student volunteers are sought to accompany our students on a free day of exploring. Usually this wonderful day of activities extends into the evening for all involved. We ask the local students if they will honor us by being our special guests guiding us to their favorite destinations. Usually one or two locals accompany several of our students. This works extremely well for everyone. The volunteers serve as our guides, and we pay for transportation and activities because often locals cannot afford it. Typically they bring us to inexpensive but wonderful restaurants, beaches, parks, historic treasures, workplaces, and in some cases, their homes to meet or dine with family members. We have eaten Peking duck (including the feet) while watching hundreds being cooked in open furnaces (inexpensively, the way locals enjoy it), chomped down 50 homemade Chinese dumplings interspersed with toasts (while noting local customs and etiquette, so important in business), lined up in a local “salon” for a dry hair wash, (in China, many students do not have daily access to showers in which they can wash their hair), enjoyed a complete head and shoulder massage, visited dormitory rooms, student dining facilities, and student bathroom and laundry facilities (which can be a shock). We have also visited temples, squares, historical statues, gravesites, and museums, rode bicycles through the streets of Beijing, climbed hundreds of stairs with locals one evening under the stars to overlook The Forbidden City, etc. Lifetime friendships are formed as the locals serve as advisors on customs and business connections — and what an opportunity to share our faith!

- Hosting a mutually organized party for local business students. This gives all students a chance to work together in sharing cultures as they plan for music, dancing, food, games, decorations, etc. A reminder of local customs occurred when one American student yelled over the music at another student who was dancing. A hush came over the Chinese because yelling was clearly inappropriate. Because all of the students had bonded, the Chinese students explained the culture and were gracious and helpful. Dancing together is also a great bond of people as music is shared from each culture and also traditional dances. (We tried to demonstrate a square dance and realized to the amusement of all that we were not nearly as proficient as our hosts at communicating our almost lost traditional songs and dances!)

- Setting up university classroom visits in which a panel of American students answer the questions from the host citizens and vice versa. This is always enjoyable, enlightening, and educational. Occasionally we have had more than 100 students at a single session. One instance of sharing in a Chinese class, an American student related that he was adopted from Korea, to which class members replied, “North or South?” The Korean War has not been forgotten by these students, and they have little knowledge of the conditions in North Korea. Politics and business questions eventually give way to personal questions of dating practices, family strictness, faith, marriage practices, and other relationship questions. It is an opportunity to experience how students feel about business, employment practices, aspirations, etc. A questionnaire is usually administered to all students, which asks questions regarding the roles of men and women, rewards they want from business employment, and altruistic aspirations. It leads to fascinating discussions as their answers are shared.

Other activities include visits to international ports to see thousands of shipments being readied; talks with public officials like the minister of railroads in India; presentations from members of a local chamber of commerce; visits to factories, talks with individuals involved in microenterprise; tours of local sites and landmarks; interviews with newspaper reporters; visits to businesses, research facilities, and stock exchanges, etc. Visits to churches and support of their activities, if it is locally appropriate, can be a wonderful way of connecting with sisters and brothers in Christ, and in the case of Asia, halfway around the world.

Students gain an understanding from these activities, but it is the personal cultural interactions and relationships developed that bring depth of understanding and connect them to the country and the people. The fads of surface travel and self-gratification quickly burn out. Students must be taught a sense of responsibility toward the communities in which they stay. They will learn how giving of themselves personally enriches their endeavors. It is truly in the giving that they receive. It is also gratifying to the hosts, who experience student generosity, consideration, and effort, rather than observing them simply taking in the sites and dashing from one destination to the next.

## EVALUATION

Education, according to William Yates, “is the lighting of a fire and not the filling of a bucket.” Follow-up of any venture is extremely important if there is to be meaningful reinforcement and evaluation of purposeful travel priorities. In order to build effective relationships and help students move into what William Howell categorized as the fourth stage of cultural awareness, “unconscious competence,” where one instinctively knows what is appropriate in the host country (Howell, 1982), contacts must be kept fresh and interactions maintained.

The effective travel educator must know how to network and follow up appropriately in order to build deep, trusting relationships — ones in which students are welcomed back to the country, and lasting business and Christian connections can be made. For students, and faculty for that matter, to process, reflect, and keep fresh the lessons learned through purposeful travel, and examine how Christ impacted lives, successfully planned trips need to be followed up by a guided unfolding of experiences, a thoughtful assessment of outcomes, and a plan to reconnect with contacts made. This is done as a team because the team prepared together, shared common experiences, and bonded over time. In business, this is routinely conducted at the conclusion of an outbound opportunity, and includes such intents as plans for contact revitalization and an analysis regarding strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the venture. With students, it is more effective if the time devoted to this activity takes place in the home culture with familiar surroundings and in a back to “normal” real-life setting, away from distractions. When this intentional unfolding does not happen, and when faculty do not make the purposeful effort to pull the team together with planned, Christ-focused interaction after travel, students can have reentry problems such as difficulty adjusting back to their pre-trip lives and affirmatively processing their cultural and group experiences. The team may even fall apart, disconnect, or revert back to their pre-trip cliquishness and attitudes. Taking advantage of this post-travel learning opportunity helps reinforce gleaned concepts, acknowledge answers to prayer and Christ’s leading and protection, unravel puzzling cultural and team member experiences, and share the emotional decompression students can experience after adventuring together in a foreign country. Students also sometimes need help dealing with the loss of newfound friends left behind in the host country. Another important consideration is to plan for physical recuperation from time zone changes (one day’s recuperation for each time zone crossed is well-

known by seasoned business travelers), illnesses, emotional upheavals, and reflection on life changes.

How are the outcomes of “purposeful, others-oriented, go-do” travel measured? It is not by traditional, institutionally prepared, exhaustive form-written surveys or electronic evaluations conducted independently in a non-academic unstructured student dormitory, administered only to students. It is instead in the observed actions and the articulations of students, faculty, and community members visited, consistent with the Christ-focused goals of the journey and including preparation and follow-up time. The evaluation is customized according to travel priorities and prepared by the educators leading the travel — it is well-known that the results of evaluations have far greater validity to the participants when they design the instrument and what is to be measured. Preparation of the evaluation instrument should also include student input because they should have committed to the travel priorities. There is no faster method to put out the flame of enthusiasm regarding international travel, for both the professor and students, than to toss a bucket of cold water from an evaluation instrument created by those educationally inexperienced with the foundations of evaluation validity and statistics or personally unfamiliar with the student travel experience. The purposeful travel experience should be evaluated and measured by the professor as a student evaluator and students as travel evaluators, measured by purposeful outcomes based on goals, and conducted during the experience and upon return. For example, outcomes were observed and answers to questions evaluated during and after returning from very successful trips to China in which students:

- Talked of the relationships developed with foreigners rather than just relationships and experiences with their team members (e.g., professor may ask about the number of local interactions and relationships students developed).
- Monitored their e-mails for notes from newfound friends (e.g., professor may ask whom they connected with and if they built a network of positive contacts for potentially returning to the host country).
- Developed pictures, albums, electronic files, filled with their host country friends rather than pictures primarily of their team friends and sites visited (e.g., professor observes what was recorded in student pictures as they tell the story! Are there abundant pictures of familiar team friends, famous sites, and “fun,” or are there pictures of foreign friends, local cultural encounters, and host country service activities as the focus?).

- Discussed cultural connections made with people through local experiences, service opportunities, and team members. (e.g., instructor read throughout the travel, submitted student chronicles about their interactions and what was recorded as memorable, meaningful, confusing, etc. Professor made comments in the margins of the chronicle about the student's interactions. The professor also gave feedback, encouraging comments, and recommendations regarding his/her observations of the student and discussed their faith journey.)
- Committed to going back to the country because they connected with the local people, and not just the sites. (e.g., on one trip, 20 percent of students returned to China within one year, attending school or teaching English as a second language and following up on networks developed. Other students committed to travel and service in China at later times.)
- Mailed gift packages of thanks to their hosts. They searched for items with school logos, pictures of the group and locals, and other items that tied them to their new friends. (e.g., professor asks to whom they send gifts to and notes the cultural care and appropriateness of gifts to maintain a positive impression.)
- Shared books, articles, and movies with each other and discussed strategic current events and the politics of the country studied. Many worried about their friends in China. (e.g., professor asks students to share insights, opinions, knowledge, cultural awareness, and implications concerning their assessment of current events and the future of the places visited. Required strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats — SWOT analysis — of the country and shared the impressive results with the administration and other classes.)
- Wanted to share with other students the meaningful connections they made with the host culture and its people plus their understanding of the country's importance in the world as a new emerging market. (e.g., professor gives students choices in which to be creative in sharing their knowledge and ideas through presentations to classes, faculty, and administrators, as well as through wall displays, photo and writing contests between team members, or perusing student and professional publications, etc. One presentation was made to the president of the university and administrators with the serving of tea and Chinese treats, speaking of Chinese language, traditional presenting of business cards, giving of gifts — a small framed picture with the name of the university in Chinese characters and other cultural customs along with photographs. A very special aspect of this event was the opportunity for future partnerships with Chinese organizations.)
- Students encouraged others to view travel in this more sophisticated manner. Students “get it” — the importance of “others orientation,” the enjoyment of “doing,” and the joy of culturally connecting. Some have interviewed other trip participants and asked questions related to culture, such as, “Did you make any host country friends or connections, and how are you following up on those relationships?” To their dismay, many can retell stories only of the “fun” they had at a pub or club, of skiing, or sightseeing with their pre-trip friends. Others have stayed in a host country town for an entire semester and returned without ever having connected with anyone in the town! (e.g., professor interviews students on the highpoints of the travel. These almost always include forming new relationships, engaging in culturally connecting activities, and participating in service experiences...even though they spend significant amounts of time sightseeing, making professional visits, and having fun with their team friends.)
- Wanted to make connections through Christian and mission organizations, business clubs, adoption agencies, etc. in the U.S. to help support the organizations visited — churches, orphanages, hospitals, etc. (e.g., professor asks how they might engage organizations in helping the communities visited.)
- Developed 3x5-foot pictures that depict the country and their new friends. These they displayed on the walls of their university in order to help educate and encourage other students to visit the country and understand its importance in the world. (e.g., professor observes their diligence and enthusiasm and asks them to question other students about their reactions to the pictures. What was the “buzz” created?)
- Asked host country contacts to comment and give helpful feedback and recommendations on student activities, cultural appropriateness, etc. (e.g., professor reads comments, processes them, and gives students ongoing feedback and encouragement throughout the travel.)
- Gave written institutional evaluations of the trip, which were very positive. (e.g., professor developed

and administered a goal-oriented evaluation instrument with input from students and made time to discuss the results with students.)

- Continued to meet for dinners and events as a team of friends — even years after the trip — and enthusiastically share e-mails they received from Chinese friends. (e.g., professor is still included in communications, giving professional recommendations, updates, etc.)
- Connected with businesses at home for jobs and internships, sharing their firsthand experiences with the culture rather than just noting the sites and countries seen. (e.g., professor requires students to update their resumes, differentiating their student travel by relating firsthand cultural experiences and networks formed.)
- Demonstrated and discussed a newfound appreciation of their home, religious freedoms, and the opportunities so often taken for granted. (e.g., professor conducts discussion group and follow-up with Christian Chinese guest lecturer.)

A fire is lit, connections are made, culture has been explored on a personal level, curiosity is stirred, enthusiasm about the country abounds, and the outcome is reflected through lives that are changed at a deep, Christ-directed, personal level. This translates into positive relationships with the host country. Ethnocentrism has been diminished, and the stage is set for business students to realize the importance of culturally connecting and to understand methods for doing this. When this happens, the educator has a great feeling of accomplishment!

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

With globalization and the expansion of business, it is imperative that students understand cultures of other countries and learn how to escape their own ethnocentric, self-reference perspectives. In this era of student travel and international tension, Christian educators and institutions have a unique challenge to properly prepare, conduct, and follow up on international journeys that equip students as responsible travelers, future global businesspeople, with Christian character. Direct cultural experiences and the voluntary giving of service to communities are effective ways to connect with host countries and teach culture at a personal level. Not only do these experiences assist in effectively preparing students, but they also serve well in building positive international relations.

Exceptional outcomes will not happen without solid preparation and follow-up. Time spent in the home setting before and after the flurry of travel is invaluable. The fruits of solid “purposeful, go-do, others-oriented” travel include a greater likelihood of journeys that absorb culture, focus on giving, fewer inappropriate cultural behaviors, less compulsiveness to “go see” as much as possible without connecting with locals, and less emphasis on the number of days traveled versus the quality of the experience. Purposeful travel also alleviates frantic fact-finding and information gathering, minimizes “McDonaldizing” (the biggest itinerary and the fastest trip), and places greater value on thoughtfully connecting with and understanding people and cultures. Student intellect is challenged, hearts are stirred, and attitudes transformed through the quality of relationships developed, the culture that has been directly imparted, and the teamwork promoted. It is a “giving” travel philosophy developed with the team and applied through locals encountered, a “what can you show and tell me of your great country, and let’s see it together, equally together.” It is a “you teach me, and I want to learn from you, and I will also share with you” attitude. It is encouragement of others. It is deliberately seeking ways to interact with, examine, and inculcate culture.

The learning is rich when it is Christ-focused and revolves around people and relationships. Instead of chasing adventure for its own sake, it is finding adventure through local connections resulting in greater learning and information dispensed experientially. People, not just places, bring learning to life and give travel its lasting, life-changing value — value that lives on through enduring relationships. It is the difference between looking at a lake as opposed to swimming in a lake. When one gets wet and splashes around with others, ingests the smells, sounds, and sights of a place and the hearts of others, this is what brings depth of understanding and experiential knowledge. We cannot conduct business unless we understand our customers, are well networked, and appreciated by the people with whom we do business. Business students need to know how to adapt locally and to each other. The indispensable priorities in enriching the travel experience for not only students but also for the international communities visited include:

1. Christ honoring, that is making Christ the center in everything that is pursued.
2. Culturally connecting, that is reaching out to understand, participate with, and giving voluntary service to the cultures visited.
3. Cognitively enriching, that is researching and studying subject matter, and personally experiencing with locals the sites and culture.

4. Community building, that is developing supportive Christ-centered relationships within the travel team and actively encouraging, through Scripture, the development and practice of Christian character.

Are these student travel experiences perfect? No, but with principled, Christ-focused travel goals, the opportunity for principled Christian travel is considerably enhanced.

Students must be prepared to function effectively in the world of globalization. Professors must give them the know-how and help them improve their ability to adapt and deal with individuals, firms, and authorities in foreign countries. The international arena is an ideal environment to cultivate flexibility, humility, adaptability and indispensable Christ-like characteristics. It is incumbent upon professors not only to introduce students to other countries and create a desire to understand culture, but to be Christ-honoring. At Bethel University, the mission states: "We prepare graduates to serve in strategic capacities to renew minds, live out biblical truth, transform culture, and advance the Gospel." It is a mission that can help develop the moral fabric of students along with profoundly reaching out and loving others as Christ has commanded. It is the differentiator. The mission should direct the manner in which students are led to study in the international classroom, as Christians, loving God and others, representing not only the United States and the institutions but Christ through our actions, engaging the head, heart, and hand. To skillfully lead travel and study business internationally, with Christ-honoring, cooperative, cognitively enriching and culturally competent goals — this is the talent and Christian competence professors bring to their students.

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