

# Ethnographic interviews in an intensive Asian Studies course in Japan & China

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# Outline :

1. Ethnographic interviews in the curriculum
2. Asian Studies Dept & “Asian Conversations” at St. Olaf College
3. About *Encountering Asia*:
  - Course objectives, Requirements, Readings
  - Pre-departure preparation
  - On-site activities
  - Results of pre-departure and post-class surveys
4. Ideas for the future

## Ethnographic interviews in the curriculum:

- **Foreign language classes** (Robinson 1985; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon 1996; Bateman 2002; Su 2008)
- **Teacher training** (Allen 2000)
- **Study abroad** (Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan & Street 2001).

## Reported merit:

- Promote positive attitude towards the native speakers
- Enhance students' understanding of their own culture
- Provide excellent opportunities for active listening

# Asian Studies Dept at St. Olaf College

- **Interdisciplinary department** (not a language department)
  - CHN/JPN language (literature & linguistics)
  - Religion, Political Science, Art/Art history, History, Economics, Reference Librarian
  - (Sociology/Anthropology, psychology, music, etc.)
- Major requirement: 10 courses
  - Language requirement – 4<sup>th</sup> semester (i.e., 2<sup>nd</sup> year level)
  - **A unique way to combine language and other courses**
  - **A way to encourage students to continue studying language**

# Asian Conversations Program at St. Olaf:

- One of the four conversations courses on campus
- 3 sequenced courses at the sophomore level, interdisciplinary courses centering Asia (Tegtmeyer Pak and Larson 2005)
  - Fall: *Mapping Journeys*
  - Interim: ***Encountering Asia (in Beijing and Tokyo)***
  - Spring: *Interpreting Journeys*
- **Take 2<sup>nd</sup> year level JPN/CHN language courses**
- “Learning community”
- Taught by Asian Studies faculty members
- Fulfill various general education requirements

# Asian215: Encountering Asia

- 4 weeks in January
- Beijing and Tokyo—IES Abroad as lesion
- 3 weeks in the target language country + 1 week in the other country
- Participants:
  - W11: N= 23 (CHN 12, JPN 11)
  - W12: N= 28 (CHN 18, JPN 10)

## Course Objectives:

- How can we best know Beijing and Tokyo?
- What experiences do we need to have?
- Who do we need to speak to and with?
- What do we need to see?
- Are direct experiences and conversations better than reading? If so, what kind of experiences and conversation are meaningful? How do we need to “interpret” these experiences?



## Requirements :

1. Attendance, participation and readings [10%]
2. Fieldnotes [40%]:
  - a) Language notes (5)
  - b) Ethnographic observation (2 places, 3 times each)
  - c) Scavenger hunts (3)
3. Interviews [20%]:
  - a) One hour long interviews in pairs
  - b) Summary (300-400 words)
4. Student-led themed Trip [20%]
5. Ideas for the final portfolio [10%]

# Readings :

## 1. **About stories :**

Maynes, M. J., Pierce, J. L., & Laslett, B. (2008). *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. (Ch. 1 & 2)

Suzuki, D., & Oiwa, K. (1996). *The other Japan*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing.

Ye, Sang (ed.) (2006). *China candid : The people on the People's Republic*. University of California Press.

## 2. **Interview project :**

Robinson, Gail L. Nemetz (1985). Chapter 6: How can we facilitate positive impressions of people from other cultures?

## 3. **Others:**

# Goals of Interview project

1. To gain an “insider” perspective on the topics at hand
2. To experience affective aspects of communication by interacting with native peers
3. To develop communicative strategies for interacting with native peers even when there are some gaps in understanding
4. To learn active listening
5. To reflect on one’s linguistic and cultural skills to further build on your communication skills
6. To transcribe the interviews and use them as “texts” in the spring semester

# Preparation in the fall:

## October:

- “Why stories?”
  - Introduction of *Telling Stories*, Oral History Project Guidelines, IRB

## November:

- Distribution of last year’s questions
- Making pairs & working on the questions in the class

## December:

- Vocabulary list (“Glossaries” on *Moodle*, useful links)
- Submission of interview questions → The end of December

# Common themes in the questions (W11)

Japanese: (5 pairs +1 group)		Chinese : (6 pairs)	
School/Education	4	School/Education	6
Hobbies	4	Family/hometown	5
Family	3	Hobbies	4
Travel	3	Current affairs	3
Friendship	2	Travel	3
Cultural difference	2	Friendship	3
Food		Dreams	2
Dreams		Cultural difference	2

# Sample questions Schools

- 1) 大学の何が好きですか。What do you like about college?
- 2) せんもんはなんですか。What is your major?
- 3) 大学生活は何が大変ですか。What is challenging in your daily life?
- 4) しけんはどうですか。しけんがあるとき、**どうやってじゅんびしますか。**
- 5) 入(学)試(験)(にゆう(がく)し(けん)はとてもたいへんだと聞きました。  
～さんの高校入試(or大学入試)はどうでしたか。
- 6) そつぎょうしてあとでなにをしようとおもいますか。
- 7) どうしてだいがくにいきたいでしたか(-->行こうと思いましたか)。
- 8) そつぎょして(-->した)あとで**多くの**日本人はなにをしますか。
- 9) ぜんぶせんせいはしたしですか。-->**大学の教授(きょうじゅ)とクラス**  
**の時以外に話をしますか。**

# Pre-departure Survey

Activities-Most Excited :			Most Worried :		
	W11	W12		W11	W12
Walking Tour	54.5%	57.1%	Interviews	<b>81.8%</b>	<b>53.6%</b>
Ethno Obs	18.2%	21.4%	Ethno Obs	13.6%	7.1%
Interviews	9.1%	3.6%	Walking Tour	4.5%	10.7%

W11 (N=23), W12 (N=28)

## Class in January :

- Discussion of Robinson (1985)
- “Trouble shooting” after the first interview
  - Hard to understand interviewee’s speech  
(Too fast, unknown expressions, etc.)
  - Hard to make follow-up questions
  - *Our interviewee spoke English!*



Slide used in January's class-1:

## Robinson (1985) The role of ethnography

Ethnography:

A method of describing a culture or situation within a culture from *the “emic” or native’s point of view, i.e. from the point of view of the cultural actor*

Thr. Interviews and participant observation

→ Why important??

## Slide used in January's class-2 : Ethnography as a method

The ethnographic method aims to **decrease bias by not preselecting** what is observed on the basis of the observer's predefined cultural categories.

*But...isn't impossible for observer to be free from own cultural bias?*

“Scientific work in ANY FIELD is NEVER VALUE-NEUTRAL” (Eisner, 1919, cited in Robinson p.74).

Non-laboratory setting: What are the pros and cons?

# The pre-post attitude survey:

Likert scale: 1 . Disagree Strongly  $\leftrightarrow$  6. Agree Strongly

(mean : Before After)

- |   |             |             |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Help me more C/J speaking friends    | <u>4.50</u> | <u>4.98</u> |
| 2. Increase my career potential         | 5.04        | 5.17        |
| 3. Enjoy living in a C/J spoken country | <u>4.78</u> | <u>5.24</u> |
| 4. Useful after college                 | 4.96        | 5.26        |
| 5. Help me acquire new ideas            | 5.30        | 5.46        |
| 6. Help me understand other cultures    | 5.48        | 5.44        |
- ✓ “Little change” as in Robinson-Stuart & Nocon (1991), Bateman (2002)
  - ✓ Increase in 1 (friends) & 3 (enjoy living)  $\rightarrow$  Experienced affectionate side of language & motivation

# Post- attitude survey only

Likert scale: 1 . Disagree Strongly  $\leftrightarrow$  6. Agree Strongly  
Aggregation of the score 4 or higher (Bateman 2002)

	AC 11&12 N=41	R-S & N (1995) N=26	Bateman (2002) N=34
Helped my understanding & respect for C/J speakers	95.1%	92%	80%
Increased my desire to learn	92.7%	73%	60%
Recommend it for next year	92.7%	100%	74%

## Students' comment:

- “...But more importantly, I learned that **it is impossible to generalize the Japanese population**. After interviewing just two people, we have the urge to generalize the opinions and characteristics of all Japanese people” (Japan student, male, W11).
- “Through this I feel that I got to witness first hand what a typical Japanese college student likes to do...I was a bit surprised by **how much she had in common with us**” (Japan student, female, W11).

## Students' comment-2 :

- *The interview of the roommates and the homestay families was probably one of the most informative assignments for me. **I learned so much more about my roommate in that one hour than I ever learned about her by living with her for two weeks.** (China student, female, W12).*

## On Experiential Learning:

- *“Overall it was an extremely enjoyable experience. I found many of the times we were able to wander around on our own”* (China student, male, W11).
- *Fortunately, being helpless in so many situations has given me the drive to improve, so I'll be studying much harder in the coming years!* (Japan student, male, W12).

# Ideas for the future :

More coordination with language courses :

- JPN/CHN 231: Interview questions with everyone (not just AC)
- JPN/CHN 232: Use of Interview materials
- JPN112: For a unit on “Family”
- JPN/CHN 251 or above: Use as authentic texts

More coordination with the other two AC courses

Incorporation of environmental issues



## Final Remarks :

- Ethnographic interview project was effective in a short in country Asian Studies course
- More intentional coordination with AC courses & language courses.
- Students seem to have motivated through the actual encounters with native speakers.
- Explore more sustainable procedures
- \$\$\$!

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