Engage International Students

Cultural Excursion Programs at MU International Center

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The Ideological Landscape of International Education

• The neo-liberal marketization agenda: Approaching international students with strong economic rationales. (Altbach, 2004; Bolsmann & Miller, 2007; Fenwick, 1987; Matthews & Sidhu, 2005; Tian & Lowe, 2009; etc.)

• Unequal dynamics in the postcolonial condition: International education, serves as the forefront where cultural attitudes, social perceptions, and institutional practices meet post-colonialism. (Bennell & Pearce, 1998; Beoku-Betts, 2004; Burke, 2006; Spring, 1998; Willinsky 1998; etc.)
The Ideological Landscape of International Education

- Both paradigms lead to an under-investigation of the experiential dimension of international education/ the ignorance of students’ own subjectivities in creating experiences.

- The experiential dimension of international education: academic experiences, cross-cultural learning, issues of social integration, and the achievement of global subjectivities (Sidhu, 2002).

- Who are our students? How do they make meanings of the social, cultural, and academic dimensions of international education on the basis of lived experiences?
Cultural Excursion Programs

• Planned and organized by the International Student and Scholar Services at MU

• Roughly 5 times a year; varied size (from 50-200 people); varied theme

• Sites all over Missouri: big cities, small farms, museums, civil war re-enactment, etc.
Research Methodology

• Started in July, 2012 & three trips so far;

• Ethnographic observations;

• In-depth individual interviews;

• Surveys.
Demographic Characteristics

- A significant proportion of students who are new international students;
- A few students who would join in us for every trip;
- More than 75% are Asian students; within that, more than 80% are Chinese students
- A mixture of graduate students and undergraduates.
Motivations

• Theme A: logistics, most directly

• Theme B: to seek social experiences; loneliness, marginalization of different degrees

• Theme C: to observe, participate in, and understand American culture
Findings - What is American Culture?

• American culture as one constructed entity
  - Seeking views and interactions to confirm pre-existing knowledge

  - Common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning (Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”; 1996).
What is American Culture?

• Destabilized and varied layers of “American culture”
• - Challenges, shocks
• - Culture in the existential form of being
• - A possible path towards a more hybrid and complex understanding of their experiences in America
“How do I see myself being a part?”

• Cultural outsiders/sojourners

• It is also through cultural excursions that students come to the understanding of identity as a matter of “what we’ve become”, as well as “becoming”, and “being”.
• Thank you!