

August 4, 2021

Dear colleagues,

This is an attempt to offer a record of the **first International Training Institute**, held for six weeks from **July- September 1969 in Singapore**.

The event was held at the Trinity Theological College. **Faculty members came primarily from the United States**. There were 101 participants (13 nations including The Marshall Islands, The Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South Korea, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Taiwan, The People's Republic of China, and Australia). Of the 21 participating from Australia, there were three Indigenous Australians, Eileen Lester from Leonora, an inland town in Western Australia, Silas Roberts from Darwin and George Winunguj from Elcho Island.

We studied the CS1, RS1, the Ur Images Course, and had many Pedagogy sessions. During Daily Office George and Silas would play the didgeridoo. In the first few days, tension arose between the Chinese Christians from the mainland of China and those from the Republic of Taiwan. I recall many discussions being held with the Faculty about these tensions and so after about three or four days, participants from Communist China left. It was felt by some that they were 'spies' come to watch what we were doing.

There were plenty of cultural and religious events, and therefore times when our western mindset was widely expanded. We were exposed to new and interesting and even confronting ways. We visited a Buddhist Temple and a Muslim mosque in Singapore. We learnt how to eat our food with our fingers and use a banana leaf as our plate. We attended worship in the Church of England Cathedral a number of times.

There was an overnight train trip to Kuala Lumpur where we witnessed some ethnic violence between local Malays and the local Chinese. This was seeing the aftermath of riots between the two groups, and the smashing down of the Chinese shopfronts. During this event Ho Chi Minh died; and we remember JWM speaking at length about his leadership of his people and the sentinel leader he had been during the long War in Vietnam.

Dharma remembers a session at which Joseph Mathews talked about the devastation that the West had wreaked on Asia. At the end of his talk, he apologized on behalf of the West and affirmed the greatness of Asians, repeating it several times. The participants, some much older than him, listened intently and were bemused. For many of us, this would have been the first time a Westerner would have apologized to us for the actions of the West.

Besides the content of the curriculum, the style of the faculty made an impact on the participants. We marveled at their stamina as they gathered for long meetings after a heavy day of study. The book store with various papers that we were studying all neatly organised in labelled shelves, the plates and cutlery laid out by the staff before a session, all demonstrated "intentionality" - one of the concepts discussed during study sessions.

Dharma also remembers how the participants were intrigued by the cartoons one of the other participants drew about the events in our life at the ITI. The cartoons were drawn and placed on a wall, and all of us used to gather around to read them and ponder over the meaning they reflected.

The Ur Image Course was one of the highlights. It was held just before the closing and the final Celebration. This Celebration was the highlight of the whole ITI with every national group taking part. The most important moment from an Australian point of view was during this Celebration. Each national group was asked to create a drama or a story or song which told the history of their nation. The Australians acted out the arrival of Captain Phillip in 1788, onto the shores of Sydney. We dramatized how the soldiers of the First Fleet had shot the indigenous peoples as they watched the arrival of the

ships onto their shore. I remember how we used a bright red cloth to symbolize spilt blood. The participants were very shaken up by our portrayal. I recall the Koreans and others asking us more questions to understand the deep meaning of the story. That was a high point for all of us Australians including our Aboriginal colleagues. We returned home different people, as none of us had ever symbolised the story of the invasion of Australia by the English colonists.

After the Singapore ITI the Australian movement grew and expanded and quite soon afterwards Religious Houses were established in every capital city around the nation.

Additional note: Mathews took me out to dinner a couple of times to test me out, I think. One night he took me to the Raffles Hotel where he danced with me, and then set me up to learn to dance the Filipino Bamboo Dance. I found it very difficult at first not to get my legs caught between the Bamboo sticks! Eventually I learnt how to do this Dance, a major effort and quite a triumph for me! After the ITI concluded I was invited by the Faculty to stay on for a week of evaluation. I was quite nervous as I was the only non-American. However I was included in all the debriefing; and I felt I was being heard and my reflections were respected.

This was the first time the Ecumenical Institute from Chicago had conducted an educational programme of such length and with such a wide and intensive curriculum.

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