

One Woman's Strives for Cross-Cultural Unity

On The first day of COM250: mass communication, my professor, Bob Ogles, introduced us to our TA, Min Jiang. Min is a petite, young Asian woman. She said hello and introduced herself briefly. She caught my attention by mentioning she had worked on the movie set of *Kill Bill*. Immediately I was interested to learn more about her and her experiences. I was also inspired to see a woman who studied communication and had an amazing professional experience at a young age.

Min Jiang is originally from China. She lived in Beijing for seven years and received her BA in 1999 from Beijing Foreign Studies University in American studies. At this point Min had no idea she would eventually come to America to study. After receiving her BA, she decided to earn her Masters at the same university in Australian studies. The reason she studied American and Australian studies is she is very interested and motivated in learning about different cultures and how these cultures interact.

Min worked for two different television stations in China from April 2001 to May 2002. Before her first position, she did not have much experience in this line of work. "I was interested in television and had a few friends in the business. I asked around and found a position at the Beijing Television Station. I was assigned local news stories to edit and translate in English. I would dub my voice and record them. I just learned as I went along." This is the first time Min was actually a part of cross-culture communication.

Then Min moved on to work for China Central Television. “It was hard at first. I was an intern working the night shifts while attending classes at the same time. It was a lot of work. What I enjoyed most was seeing how people work together to produce the news stories. The show is a news show comparable to Good Morning America. We had about 20 million viewers, so knowing that many people were watching gave me a sense of achievement.” This is where Min really began to deepen her interest in cross-cultural communication. She did not only learn technical skills from this experience; she became aware of the symbiosis people can achieve from working together to communicate and produce a finished product.

After earning her MA in Australian studies at Beijing Studies University in April 2002, Min was still in China when Miramax and Disney came to Beijing to produce *Kill Bill*. Min laughed and explained that she became involved in this project through her friends in the movie business:

“I had already graduated and thought why not go for it? There were four different positions I was asking about. I was interested in translation or work in the art department since this is what my previous experience was in, but instead they asked me to help Tarantino. I was his local assistant. Basically, my job was to do a little bit of everything. I kept people away from the set, made sure he had everything he needed, coordinated his schedules, and was also in charge of correspondence from the movie sets in Beijing and Hollywood.”

Working on *Kill Bill* was monumental because Min was coming into this job as a Chinese woman working for an American man. She had to communicate with Tarantino as well as serve as his communicator to the rest of the non-American crew. This is a perfect example of cross-cultural communication. The most important thing Min learned from this experience is how important communication is. She saw how difficult cross-cultural interactions and working together can be. “There was a driver we had on the set

who spoke Chinese and was having difficulties communicating with the American and Japanese speaking people. They couldn't understand and tell each other what time they had to be somewhere. So the producer came up with an idea to type into the cell phone the time they needed to arrive and then give it to the driver. You have to think of different ways to communicate." Thinking of different ways to communicate is something Min seems to live by.

While at a conference during her schooling in Australian studies, Min's interest in studying abroad was sparked. Min decided to come to Purdue University to earn her PHD in communication. "I wanted to study overseas and bring my knowledge back to China."

At Purdue Min has taught the recitation of COM 435: Communication and Emerging Technologies, COM 114: Fundamentals of Speech Communication, and she is currently the teaching assistant for COM 250: Mass Communication and Society. Min has also presented many of her publications on topics related to communication, social transformation, and culture at conference presentations. Min's passion is bringing together people from other cultures and assisting them in communicating. "People in China and people in the U.S. do not understand each other. The only news here about people in China is negative. The only news in China about America is skewed because the Chinese do not understand Americans because of our government." By teaching, Min hopes to educate others in cross-cultural communication. The day Min taught my COM 250 course her lecture was on China. I remember most clearly Min saying that in terms of technology, China is more advanced. If China and America would communicate and work together by combining their knowledge, both societies would benefit. Since most of us in the course are communication majors, she stressed the fact that communication is

not only about Americans communicating with themselves. It is about our sometimes closed-minded society reaching out to communicate with other societies.

One way that Min has already started to make a difference and bring about social change and understanding of others culture is through “Ask Tim.” She is the program coordinator for “Ask Tim”, which is a question and answer column webpage run by Americans for Chinese students. Since American and Chinese customs are so different, many foreign exchange students here are confused about social norms. The column is a place where students can write in with their questions and have them answered, without feeling ashamed for not knowing about the American culture. One of the questions submitted was regarding Americans way of greeting each other. Americans say “Hey, how are you?” when they see a friend on the street, but then keep walking with out waiting for the answer. This norm is foreign and confusing to Chinese people.

Before I left I asked Min what her plans for the future are. “Eventually I would like to go back to China and put my knowledge into practice. Many people talk about wanting things to change. I want to actually go and do it.” In the immediate future however, Min plans to go to an academy some where in the U.S. to teach intercultural communication. “I’ve been at Purdue for a while now, and it is great, but I think I’m ready to go somewhere else.”

Works cited

Jiang, Min. Personal Interview. 3 February 2005.