

May 6, 2013

Tianjin 2013: A Graduation Odyssey

The FIU burst of energy that you may be feeling this week most certainly radiates from Tianjin, China, an intense port city of 11 million people just east of Beijing. During the past two days, FIU undergraduates in the Marriott School of Hospitality and Tourism Management have celebrated their final days as FIU students and their graduation on the campus of our partner, the Tianjin University of Commerce (TUC).

[Click here to see the 2013 TUC-FIU Talent Show!](#)

Monday, May 6, brought a student-led talent show that has now become a tradition for graduating seniors, who were all in attendance at the traditional TUC auditorium that would also house Tuesday's culminating ceremonies. Between acts, I had the opportunity to speak with many of the departing seniors. I found that they were happy to be completing their studies but "sad" that their experience was coming to an end. One student, bespectacled in designer glasses, lamented that she might never see many of her friends again. Another told me she was sad that her studying days were over.

This common emotional theme reminded me that young people are fully aware that one door is closing with graduation, as I would remind them today, and that others, possibly many, would open. Their anxiety was underlined when the opening musical group of students known as "Psycho" shouted that this "was the dawning of the rest of their lives." This song, followed by Rihanna's "Take A Bow," performed by a different group of students, set the tone for the rest of the performances. Another highlight – "Robot Doll," a techno hip-hop number danced by Lu Han – gave some relief to the tone of momentary apocalypse that had been set. Veteran FIU Professor Percival "Val" Darby, now teaching in Tianjin, got everybody happy with his Jamaican rendition of "Day-O." I must admit that a number of us sang along as he belted out the notes. Student Qi Qi returned to a more somber theme, showing great vocal dexterity with her version of Sarah Brightman's "Time to Say Goodbye."

A smoggy Tuesday morning in Tianjin could not obscure the joy among the nearly 250 graduating students who assembled for their final call. Class Valedictorian Zang Ji reminded students to thank their families. TUC President Liu Shu Han, co-founder of the FIU Tianjin initiative, spoke to students about the reality of internationalization; his co-founder, former Vice Mayor Wang Shuzu, proudly reminded the joyful audience that FIU had now graduated more than 1,000 students in the Tianjin program. They spoke against the backdrop of a new TUC-FIU graduation banner that graced the entire back wall of the stage.

A graduation first: Three graduates were actually BBC-based students on study abroad! Their bonds of solidarity with fellow Tianjin students were so intense that Patti Kittiko, Stephanie Ramos and Krysta DiBenedetto remained to graduate with their Chinese classmates. No one was prouder of them than Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management Dean Mike Hampton and their Associate Dean Wong Wenjun.

As I was mingling with graduating students on my way out of the commencement area, I couldn't help but notice four crying graduates huddled in a perfect circle, consoling each other. They were the only ones whose sadness carried over from the day before. As the smog cleared, the future could not have been more promising! Happy graduation to our Tianjin Class of 2013!