

Welcome

Before we go around the room...

- Col. Scott Manning, commander of Yale's Air Force ROTC detachment
- Tom Opladen, Yale Class of 1966, chair of the Yale Veterans Association
- Henry Kwan, Director of Shared-Interest Groups at the AYA, who has a Master's degree from Yale in International Relations

Introductions (name, where from, when you were at IFEL)

How did we come to be here today?

- *Answering this reminds us of the blind men and the elephant*

Many of you know: during WW II, Yale gave itself over to supporting the war effort. The campus became essentially a military base...

- Yale allowed the Army to take over 8 of its 10 residential colleges, plus all of the Old Campus. By the end of the war, nearly 20,000 military personnel had been trained at Yale in courses such as engineering, ballistics, medical training, administration, and military intelligence.
- One of the things that made Yale attractive to the Army was its reputation as a leader in language study, and in 1943 the university started something called the Chinese Language School, where U.S. Army officers were taught Putonghua.
- This school grew rapidly, and in 1946 it was renamed as the "Institute of Chinese Language and Literature."

Even before the Chinese Language School was founded, faculty at Yale had begun developing a system of transliterating East Asian languages using the Western alphabet, to make it easier for Americans to learn them.

- This system came to be known as Yale Romanization, and the first language they tackled was Putonghua.

By the end of the war, the system had been so successful that Yale began expanding it to Korean, Japanese, and Cantonese Chinese. Rather than establish separate learning centers for each language, the university decided to combine them. So it was that in 1947, the *Institute of Chinese Language and Literature* was succeeded by the **Institute of Far Eastern Languages**.

At around this time, the Institute's teachers began developing a radical new approach to learning a spoken language that relied on intensive interaction between students, teachers, and recordings. This innovative new approach came to be known as the Yale Method.

As the IFEL instructor Robert N. Tharp writes in his book *They Called Us White Chinese* (which we'll come back to in a moment):

It is safe to say that Yale's Institute of Far Eastern Languages was among the first to pioneer the so-called "Language Laboratory," which is now so familiar in all language programs. Our "electronic classrooms," as they were sometimes called at the time, were among the very first such installations in this country.

Today, when young people all over America want to learn Chinese to give themselves a leg up in business or academia, it's hard to remember that during the Cold War, the study of Asian languages was seen mostly as a military necessity. By the early 1950s, when the Korean War broke out, IFEL's primary mission had become the training of USAF personnel, mostly in Chinese and Korean.

Back in those days, the Institute of Far Eastern Languages was housed in a 3-story brick building just a few blocks from here, at 215 Park Street. This building was originally constructed by a Yale fraternity back in 1931, and it was thought to be a fairly lavish building for its day. So lavish, in fact, that the fraternity went bankrupt less than a decade later. Yale took over the building, but didn't have any immediate use for it, and it sat empty until IFEL came along. So IFEL was the first Yale program to be housed at 215 Park Street after it became a university building.

IFEL continued to expand, and by the late '50s it had outgrown the building. So the Institute had already moved out of 215 Park Street by the time most of you were with the program in the early '60s...

Anyone here remember studying at 215 Park Street?

And IFEL, as a separate entity, ceased to exist in 1965, when its faculty and classes were merged into Yale's broader language-study program.

So for several decades after this, it might have seemed that the legacy of the Institute of Far Eastern Languages would pass into history, mostly forgotten — especially since most of you were studying for purposes that couldn't be shared publicly. (Even today, over half a century after Kevin Riddle was studying at IFEL, I still can't get him to tell me what he did with his Chinese ability after he left Yale.)

But there was one especially bright shining moment for IFEL's students, and it happened in June 1962 when John F. Kennedy came to Yale to receive an honorary degree. Out of that day came one of the most famous photographs ever taken on this campus: *[show photo]*

As Kevin later wrote,

In June 1962 I was in the US Air Force and a student at Yale's Institute of Far Eastern Languages. Henry Fenn was the director of IFEL, and the head of our particular Chinese program was Mr. Robert N. Tharp, who published a most interesting book about his experiences entitled *They Called Us White Chinese*. Our squadron of students was invited to serve as an honor guard for President Kennedy on the occasion of the commencement, and most of us enthusiastically accepted. The young men in uniform in the photograph were all language students. We were all given prints of the photograph, and nearly 50 years later it found its way into my Web album.

And it was in Kevin's web album that the photo was noticed nearly two years ago by a Yale alumnus, Ravi Goel, Class of '93, a doctor in Philadelphia who collects rare books and photographs. He had recently acquired an original print similar to this one, and was doing research to find out more about it when he discovered Kevin's on-line album in December of 2011. He wrote to Kevin, and they started corresponding.

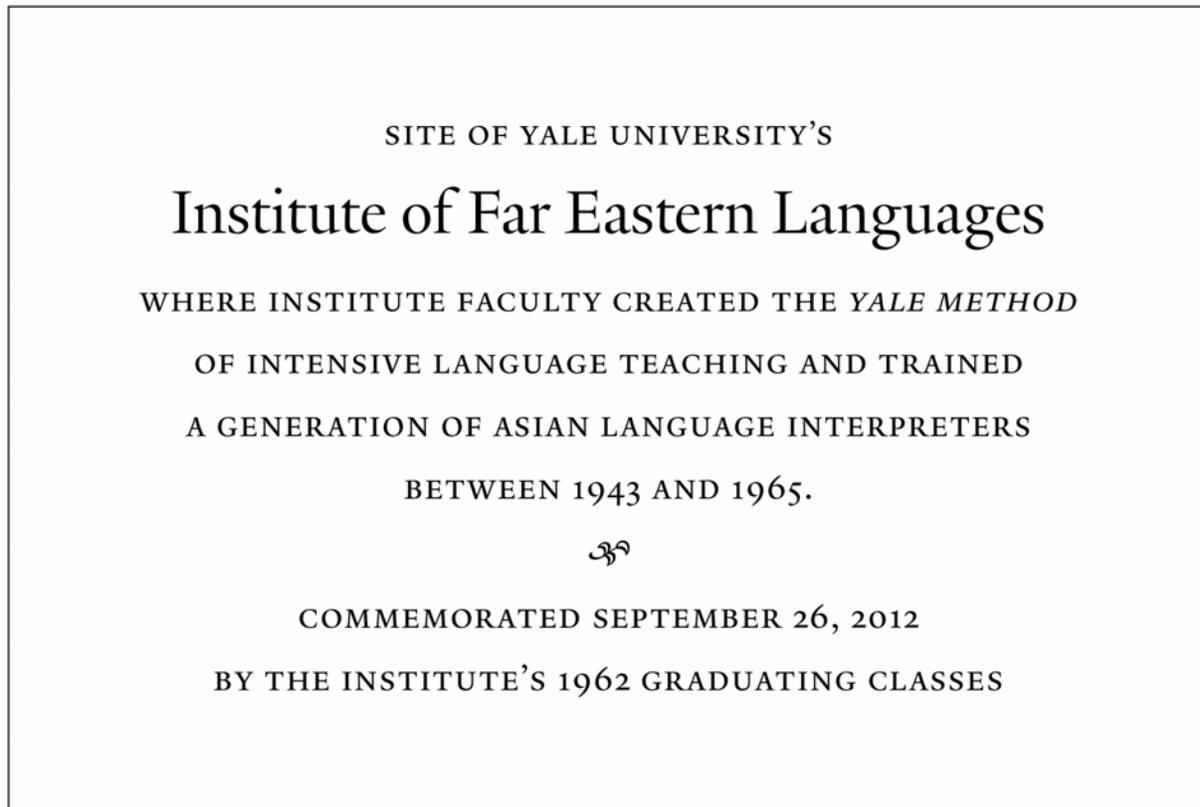
During this correspondence Kevin mentioned how interesting it was that Ravi should be a Yale alum, because as the 50th anniversary of Kevin's time at Yale was drawing near, he had started thinking how nice it would be if there could be some sort of reunion or celebration to mark that milestone. As it turned out, Philadelphia is in my territory for the AYA, so Ravi knew me... and he suggested that Kevin drop me a line. He did, and we started corresponding, and that's how the idea of a 50th-anniversary reunion here on campus was born.

So 21 of you came back to Yale last September, exactly one year ago tomorrow, for a day of fun and remembrance.

- *How many of you were here?*

Thanks to my colleague **Henry Kwan**, who coordinates the AYA's relations with the Yale Veterans Association, we were able to involve **Col. Scott Manning** and many of his Air Force ROTC cadets during that day. We had the enthusiastic support of the Yale Veterans Association, led then (as now!) by Mr. **Tom Opladen**, Yale Class of '66. And when we started researching the history of IFEL, we couldn't have done it without the tremendous help of Yale's Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures — the successor institution to IFEL — headed then by **Prof. Edward Kamens**, and today by **Prof. Tina Lu**, and most especially by that department's admin assistant, **Tracy Ford**. (*Tracy still has your grades on file, so you'd better be nice to her!*)

That evening last September, the IFEL Class of 1962 group presented the Yale library with a copy of Mr. Tharp's book, *They Called Us White Chinese* [**show book!**] and a brass commemorative plaque that would be placed inside the entryway of 215 Park Street, where IFEL first began. The plaque reads:



However, as those of you who were there remember, what you presented to Yale that night was not an actual plaque, but a fiber-board design for a plaque, which even then was superbly crafted by the Yale University Printer, **Mr. John Gambell**.

The creation of the actual brass plaque took much longer, not only because John had to find the right craftsman, but also because we had to find the right place to mount it.

At first we thought of putting it in the current offices of Yale's Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures. But that old building on Temple Street, which has no particular architectural distinction, occupies part of a site earmarked for what will someday be a new flagship headquarters for the Yale School of Engineering. Eventually Kevin realized that there was really only one place the plaque could go, and that was at 215 Park Street.

So in a little while, we'll all walk over to 215 Park Street so that you can have a look and take some pictures. We are also honored to have with us the university's official photographer, **Mike Marsland**, who will capture the moment for us.

We originally thought we'd call this an "unveiling," but then we realized that would be a bit pompous, since the plaque has been in place for several months already. So we're going to restrict all the ceremonial part of the morning to right here and now, and once we're at 215 Park Street I'm hoping that at least some of you will break out into song.

I do worry a little bit that those of you who studied at 215 Park Street back in the 1950s might find it slightly less elegant than it seemed at the time. Today it's used for support offices of the Yale University Art Gallery, and about 10 years ago, when Yale renovated the building, it had to add a small personal elevator in the entrance stairwell in order to bring the building up to the accessibility requirements of modern building codes.

Nevertheless, this is one building that I know will always be part of the Yale campus. And since your brass plaque will always be part of this building, we know that all of you who were such an important part of IFEL's history will always be part of this university.