

Reaching Students from the People's Republic of China

A TRAINING PUBLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS, INC.

REACHING STUDENTS FROM THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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Reaching Students from the People's Republic of China

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Introduction

The Urgency to Reach Chinese Students

In the 1980s, thousands of Chinese students and visiting scholars passed through American universities. Today, some 64,000 Chinese are here, and most of them are pursuing graduate level degrees.

In 1994, the People's Republic of China was the second largest student-sending country to the United States, surpassed only by Japan. Here are some significant facts about these students. They are:

- the elite of China;
- potential leaders of China's future;
- more than ever before, because of the after-effects of the Beijing massacre (in the streets of Beijing and Tiananmen Square in June 1989), open to Christianity;
- a potential witness for the Gospel to the nearly 1.2 billion people in China.

With thousands of years of tradition, cultural development, and history, China is one of the oldest cultures in the world. It has known centuries of political and social upheaval, foreign invasion, and persecution. It has experienced a multitude of religions, including Animism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, atheistic Communism and Christianity. In the past, unfortunately, Christianity in China has often reflected a Western world ideology that is alien, insensitive, and sometimes oppressive to the Chinese people and their culture.

Yet today we have a wonderful opportunity—right in our own communities—to reflect the true nature of Jesus' love to Chinese people. Indeed, to effectively reach these students, we must follow the example of Jesus, who never dealt with any two individuals the same way. He simply said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

This booklet is designed to help you understand some basics about your Chinese friend. It will help you to be a sensitive and effective witness for Jesus Christ. But this booklet is by no means comprehensive. You will want to supplement it with additional information on the People's Republic of China—its various cultures, religions, and people.

As you prayerfully apply the ideas and suggestions in this booklet, remember to seek service and obedience to God over success. If you follow His lead under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God will honor your efforts.

If you would like more information about international student ministry, please complete the response section at the end of this booklet. We're here to serve you as you serve international students in Jesus' name.

International Students, Inc.

Before You Start

An Open Door to China

Students from the People's Republic of China represent about 18 percent of all international students in America, and yet ministry and efforts to share Jesus Christ among this group have not been entirely effective. Too many Chinese students return home ignorant or indifferent about the Good News. These students are only a small part of the vast population of Chinese who remain hidden behind China's closed doors.

In order to reach Chinese students with the Gospel, we must first understand them the best we can. Obviously, there is a lot about China that you may never know or understand. But your attempt to study about the nation of China—its history, culture, and people—will go a long way in affirming your friendship and providing opportunity for further ministry.

Reaching the Chinese student begins with friendship—with no strings attached.

Witness by Action and Word

We must earn the right to be heard.

Before you begin to witness to a Chinese student, or anyone for that matter, you must first develop a relationship of trust and communication. You should first develop a friendship.

This booklet is written with the assumption that you have already developed such a relationship with a Chinese student before you begin to share your faith with him or her. This is very important, because much of the credibility of your witness will depend on what the student knows and thinks of you.

If you need to know more about developing relationships with international students, you may wish to obtain a copy of *Becoming a Friend with an International Student* (contact ISI to order).

As you develop friendships with international students, they may ask, "Why are you helping me?" An appropriate response is: "Because I've experienced God's goodness in my life, and He's taught me to show kindness to others."

We ought to be careful to model Jesus. He met the needs of others—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—with no strings attached. Our international friends will be closely watching.

We must be available as a daily witness of God's leading in our lives. Our words and actions should provide natural opportunities to share our faith.

A Brief History of China

China: "Center of the World"

One of the oldest nations in the world, China's history can be traced back continuously to 3000 B.C. Its achievements in culture, language, and invention far surpassed those of any nation existing at that time.

Five centuries before Jesus Christ, great intellectual teachers such as Confucius helped establish ethical and philosophical belief systems that guided Chinese society for more than 2,000 years, with little interference from the outside world.

One of the world's greatest wonders, the Great Wall of China, was built during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.), while the emerging Republic of Rome was still struggling with the Carthaginians. During the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907), the height of China's cultural and material prosperity, Europe was experiencing the Dark Ages. When Marco Polo visited China (A.D. 1257-1292), he was astonished by its advancement. His reports about the Chinese burning coal, using paper money, and making noodles were regarded as fairy tales in the West.

Traditionally, Chinese people are very proud of their culture. In fact, the word ZhongGuo (China) means "center of the world." Since China's earliest beginnings, a strong sense of cultural superiority has dominated Chinese psychology, lasting for more than 1,000 years until the Opium War between China and the British Empire in 1840.

This war was the result of China's resistance to British imports of opium into China from India. China's defeat led to a series of humiliating, unequal treaties with Britain, which allowed Britain and several other countries (including the United States) to exploit China's resources for their own economic gain. As a result, China's sense of cultural superiority was crushed. This attitude was replaced by a complicated mixture of caution, fear, and some worship of other nations and cultures, particularly those of the Western world.

Ironically, the Protestant Christian missionary movement was a major beneficiary of China's political humiliation. Christian missionaries accelerated their efforts to Christianize China. Unfortunately, in the minds of most Chinese, these actions forever linked Christianity with foreign imperialism and invasion. Such sayings as, "Whenever a Chinese is converted, China will lose a citizen," expressed the hatred many Chinese felt toward Christianity and foreign missionaries.

After World War II and the Chinese Civil War (1946-49), when the Chinese Communists under Mao Zedong were able to oust Chiang Kai Shek and the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist

Party), the new government vowed to create a new China, molded along Marxist lines. During this time, the relationship between Christianity and imperialism was highly dramatized, allowing the Communists to persecute Christians and other religious groups and to require that all Chinese follow a strict regimen of atheistic Communist teachings and activities.

In order to consolidate his political power, Mao began China's Cultural Revolution (1966-76), in which the radical ideals of Marxism were initiated upon every aspect of life. This included closing down China's educational institutions, persecuting intellectuals and religious believers, and forcing young people to educate themselves by doing heavy labor in factories or among China's peasant population.

Also known as the "Ten Year Disaster," the Cultural Revolution caused immeasurable suffering, economic chaos, and an incredible loss of life. After the death of Mao in 1976, the radical leftists were discredited and, in 1978, Deng Xiaoping came into power. This more pragmatic leadership initiated a series of economic, political, and cultural reforms and developed links with other nations, but all within definite limits.

In the late 1980s, a prodemocracy movement that seemed unstoppable was sweeping across the People's Republic of China. Public support for the movement swelled—particularly among China's intelligentsia. They expressed their prodemocracy views through marches, speeches, and with the symbolic erection of the "Goddess of Liberty" in Beijing's Tiananmen Square.

On June 4, 1989, however, news headlines shocked the world: "Blood Bath in Beijing." Military troops overran students in Tiananmen Square—"The Gate of Heavenly Peace"—and dealt a fatal blow to the public cry for democracy. Since the bloodshed, the Communist party has tightened its control of the People's Republic of China.

Deng's now famous 1993 excursion to China's prosperous southern region signalled a renewed commitment to economic reform. Under the leadership of heir-apparent Jiang Zemin, China has enjoyed record economic growth, and China's people have experienced a great degree of individual freedom. Meanwhile the government, fearful of social instability during the transition of power or the reversion of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997, has pursued a policy of social and political tightening. Organized groups, including religious believers and China's minority nationalities, have experienced particular pressure. The greatest barrier to China's political and social tightening of policy is Taiwan, which has agreed in principal to the policy but not in practice. Tensions continue as China attempts to exhibit control over the island. Among the world community, human rights issues remain a concern.

The next five years represent a critical period in China's existence. To investors and firms, China represents a vast market that has yet to be fully tapped. This point is best illustrated by the rapid growth of cell phone and Internet use in China.

Many Kinds of Chinese Students

Who Are the Students Among Us?

Chinese students in the United States represent the cream of the crop. They have proved their intellectual achievement in their various fields of study. Most Chinese students come to the United States for graduate study, usually specializing in the sciences—such as computer science, mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology—and many other natural and social science fields.

One way to understand the many kinds of Chinese students is to consider the different age groups (and backgrounds) of Chinese who come here to study. For example, Chinese students can be divided into three major groups or generations: older, middle, and younger.

Older Generation (Age 40 to 60)

- These “students” (mostly visiting scholars) have the strongest ties with Chinese tradition.
- The people of this generation suffered the most during China’s Cultural Revolution.
- These Chinese come to the United States with J-1 visas (see “A Note about Visa Status,” pp. 12-13) usually for limited time periods (one month to two years). More than 95 percent of this group returns home.
- Most of these Chinese have prominent positions in varied scientific fields in China.
- This group tends to have the poorest adaptability to a new culture, and language skills are a major frustration.
- These Chinese tend to be relatively isolated on their school campuses, and thus more open to genuine friendships.
- They tend to enjoy activities such as potluck meals and tours of the United States. Although the best ministry results have been in the area of “planting the seed” of knowledge about Christianity, which many will take back to China and share with family and friends, many others have enjoyed close friendships with American Christians and have returned home as believers.

Middle Generation (Age 29 to 39)

- These Chinese grew up in the “new China,” and were raised under a strict regimen of atheistic Communistic teachings.
- This group includes the children of many prominent Chinese Communist leaders.
- From a very young age, these students were politically active, participating in the Red Guard, and were caught up in the ideals of China’s Cultural Revolution.
- With the disastrous effects and failure of the Cultural Revolution, many in this group experienced disillusionment and a “crisis of belief.”
- These Chinese tend to be ambitious, hard working, critical, and sometimes selfish. Most have achieved a lifelong dream by going to college and on to graduate school in the United States by their own means.
- About 65 percent of these students come here under a J-1 visa status and 35 percent under an F-1 visa, basically for long-term graduate study in the United States.
- Many of these students have family with them in the United States. Their children are enrolled in American schools.
- These Chinese have an amazing adaptability to America’s culture; most don’t want to return to China and hope to settle in the United States permanently.
- These students tend to be critical of Christianity, having many tough questions for which they believe there are no satisfactory answers.
- Ministry to this group requires sensitivity, patience, sincerity, and a willingness to confront tough questions about Christianity. If these Chinese become Christians, they tend to be strong believers, with an eagerness to be discipled and to evangelize others.

Younger Generation (Age 18 to 28)

- These Chinese may be called “the lucky generation,” because they didn’t experience many of the hardships brought on by China’s Cultural Revolution.
- Many in this group have little or no faith in Communism. Instead, they place their faith in science or in their own abilities.

- These Chinese tend to be idealistic, confident, and competitive. They can, however, be naive, with a poor sense of support for what they say they believe.
- Most of these students entered college directly from high school, and they have come to the United States for graduate studies. About 10 percent come as undergraduates.
- About half of these students hold J-1 visas and half hold F-1 visas. Many plan to stay in the United States permanently.
- Some are here with their spouses, and a small percentage of these spouses are part- or full-time students themselves.
- Effective ministry approaches with these students include group activities and conferences, where presentation of the Gospel can challenge and correct their presuppositions about Christianity.

A Note about Visa Status

Chinese students in the United States may come with one of the following types of visas:

J-1 (Gong Fei) Visa

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, China's leaders were pressured to reopen China to the outside world. These developments included new cultural exchange programs with the United States, in which scientific scholars have come here for short-term research and studies.

These Chinese are granted special J-1 visas, which legally guarantee that the scholars will return to China when their study programs are finished. These scholars tend to be supported either by the Chinese government (with a stipend of about \$400 per month) or by the American institutions that invite them here.

J-1 (Zhi Fei Gong Pai) Visa

In recent years, a new kind of J-1 visa appeared through China's Education Department. It is for self-sponsored students who want to study in the United States. This new visa still stipulates that applicants promise to return to China or else face punishment, such as suspended jobs, fines, and so forth. Students with this visa, however, are more independent of their sending institutions because they must arrange their own financial support.

Most of these students rely on connections in the United States, such as friends or relatives, or on American universities that offer full scholarships. Students with J-1 visas are much like those

with the F-1 visas, particularly after the Beijing massacre in June 1989, when many changed their J-1 visas to F-1 status.

F-1 (Zhi Fei) Visa

Officially, except for the application for a passport, these students are independent of China's government. They come to the United States having private sponsorship or financial support from U.S. universities.

Students with F-1 visas may have more than academic pursuits in mind when they come to the United States. Many plan to stay here permanently and may try to influence Americans to help them with these plans.

Understanding the Chinese

Internal Glimpses of Your Friend

Culture

Most Chinese students reflect a cultural identity that is a mixture of ancient Confucianism and modern Communism.

The teachings of Confucius, or Kong Fu-zi (551-479 B.C.), have deeply influenced China for more than 25 centuries. Above all else, Confucius emphasized the need for an equitable social order. One scholar writes:

In the strictest sense of the word, Confucianism cannot be called a religion. Rather it is a system of ethics, a theory of government, a set of personal and social goals...
(Lewis M. Hopfe, *Religions of the World*, p. 183).

Confucianism teaches the Chinese to value social relationships, to live proper lives of respect and courtesy toward others, and the denial of self for the good of all. This goes along with Confucius' belief that human nature is basically good but becomes disordered and crippled by a poor environment, such as under the leadership of a weak or corrupt government.

Marxism's ideals regarding human nature and the value of humankind are quite similar to Confucianism. This may explain how easily these two philosophical approaches coexist in many Chinese people. In a sense, Confucianism cleared the way spiritually for Communism's temporary success in China.

While many Chinese students may now disparage Communism, they may be confusing their distaste for this philosophy with their distaste for China's Communist government. In reality, these students still hold to the fundamental principles of Communism and will rebuke the teachings of Christianity. That may explain why some Chinese want to adjust and adapt to Western culture, but have difficulty understanding the emphasis placed on individual freedom, religion, and family values.

Basically, Chinese students tend to have three kinds of culture-based resistance to Christianity. First, Chinese intellectuals may resist and reject the Gospel because of concerns that Christianity will destroy traditional Chinese culture. Traditionally, Chinese intelligentsia see Christianity as some kind of superstition or as an inferior foreign philosophy.

Second, many Chinese remember Christianity's historical link with the imperialistic invasion of China in the 1800s. These Chinese might agree with the Communist phrase, "Christianity is the running dog of imperialism."

The third form of resistance comes from Marxism's attack against all religion. To the Chinese Marxist, religion only frustrates people's efforts toward happiness. Marxism affirms that a person—not a sovereign God—controls his or her own destiny.

Philosophy

Through its vast history, China has produced many great thinkers—such as Confucius, Lao-zi (father of Taoism), and Liang Qiqiao (leader of the first democracy movement in China). However, since the Communist takeover of China, Marxist doctrine has impacted every facet of society. This pervasive indoctrination process attempted to eradicate any objective understanding of other philosophies and ideas, which ultimately weakened the analytical ability of many Chinese people.

This analytical weakness is common among Chinese students, particularly those of the middle and younger generations who were raised and educated under China's communist system.

Although many Chinese students may not think of themselves as "Communists," in reality their thinking pattern and world view is identical to Communism. They will tend to accept certain Marxist doctrines as the only proper way to view the world; such things as:

- Human beings create and decide human history.
- Science leads people to truth.
- Religion (especially Christianity) is opium to people.

While many Chinese students will accept these teachings as fact, most know little or nothing about the source—Marxism. Very few have even read anything by Karl Marx. What these students know and believe is what the Chinese government has promoted through education and propaganda.

Thus, when Chinese students hear about Christianity, their presupposition is that all religions, in essence, are untrue. When Christians explain Christ's pronouncement that He is Truth, Chinese students tend to reject the statement without much consideration.

Spiritual Experience

In the tradition of Confucianism, many Chinese have a fundamental problem with two of the major teachings of Christianity: the sinful nature of humankind, and the anticipation of eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ.

Central to Confucianism are concepts teaching proper behavior in relationships, both between individuals and under an appropriate government. Thus, Confucius' teachings imply the natural goodness—or at least the natural perfectibility—of humankind.

Apparently Confucius believed that under the proper circumstances it is possible for individuals to achieve goodness and to eventually achieve the status of the superior human being (Hopfe, p. 185).

Also, Confucius' emphasis on reason and practical living left little room for discussion about heaven or hell, or even the need for such places. Confucius said: "Without knowing this life, how can I know the life after?" Thus, many Chinese value practicality, concentrating on the here and now, and on cultivating one's own perfectness.

In light of recent history, many Chinese, particularly students in the United States, are experiencing a "crisis of belief." Representing the intellectual community of China, these students and visiting scholars were raised to accept and support Communism without exception. They put all of their hope, love, and confidence in this "religion" (though most Chinese would not accept this as a definition for their devotion to Communism).

After generations of suffering and persecution for a "new China," the disaster of the Cultural Revolution and the discrediting of Mao's government and supporters, and especially after the Beijing massacre, many Chinese have become disillusioned with Communism and China's Communist government. This disillusionment has made some Chinese students hypersensitive about where they can place their faith. Such hypersensitivity carries over into doubt, criticism, and sometimes even discrimination toward other political and religious teachings.

Many Chinese, consciously and unconsciously, are on a spiritual search to find a new truth that they hope will help themselves and China's future. This search has often translated into a curiosity about and study of Christianity.

The Need for Friendship

Why Chinese Students Need American Friends

Chinese students in the United States tend to be lonely. Externally, they suffer loneliness because of separation from family, language difficulties, cross-cultural frustrations, financial burdens, and sometimes the insensitivity and inattention of others. Internally, Chinese students may have problems getting along with each other, because of a cultural tradition of isolation and the fear of persecution from China's Communist government.

- *Family*: Many Chinese students leave their families in China. If a student tries to get his or her family to emigrate here, delays and difficulties in the process are often a constant burden.
- *Language*: Improving their English is often a crucial goal for Chinese students. They must develop adequate English skills not only to ensure good grades, but also to maintain their self-esteem among Americans. Fear of "losing face" is generally a great concern among students, and particularly so among the older visiting scholars.
- *Culture*: The Chinese believe in "survival of the fittest," particularly as it relates to the adaptation to American culture. Many students will struggle to adjust as quickly as possible. They will sometimes even prefer to be treated like Americans. Yet, they remain frustrated by limited time, busy schedules, and their own deep attachment to Chinese culture. These students may be confused by American language clichés or colloquialisms, humor, body language, and "foreign" behavior that appears to be a contradiction of social rules and moral values.

Examples of American behavior that Chinese students often find disturbing are: pointing at people, beckoning people by waving a forefinger at them, blowing one's nose in public, a woman whistling, men pulling up their pants in public, and so forth.

- *Finances*: Although the Chinese who come here may have had good jobs and a comparatively secure standard of living in China, they often find themselves in very humble living situations while in the United States. Three or four students sharing a one-bedroom apartment is very common, and many can afford only a minimal monthly allowance for food.

These financial pressures affect Chinese students in different ways; some become so needy as to try to get employment, even illegally. Others, who are self-supported students, may work more than 20 hours a week in two, three, or even four jobs, just to pay for tuition, food, and housing.

Another financial pressure affecting some Chinese students may be the materialism of American culture. These students save every penny to buy modern American appliances (such as computers, color television sets, video recorders, and so forth), which they may send to family in China or keep as part of their plan to stay in the United States.

- *Social Interaction*: Chinese students may experience great frustration in dealing with Americans, especially in terms of learning appropriate English, feeling racial discrimination, and experiencing insensitivity from some Americans regarding cultural differences. With enough bad experiences, these students may become reserved and reclusive.

In Chinese culture, for example, friendships often demand a stronger commitment than Americans are accustomed to making. As a result, Chinese students may feel that Americans are superficial.

Another significant cultural difference is Americans' lack of recognizing titles and authority. In China, titles and lines of authority are clearly identified and respected. Using a person's first name without permission is considered offensive. Thus, most Chinese students or scholars with doctoral degrees (65 percent of all Chinese students in America are pursuing doctoral studies) will naturally prefer the title "Doctor" or "Dr." with their name instead of the informality of their first name, unless they indicate otherwise.

- *Isolation*: Chinese students tend to be loners. Despite feelings of loneliness, their cultural tradition keeps them isolated from others, particularly from other Chinese. Chinese people have a traditional saying that recognizes this cultural weakness in themselves: "One Chinese is highly capable to compete with ten Japanese, but ten Chinese will lose to ten Japanese, because they have no spirit to unify their minds and strength." This may explain in part why a nation some 10 times larger in population than Japan can be so far behind its tiny neighbor in technology and economics.
- *Fear of Persecution*: Chinese students may be politically and spiritually defensive because they fear persecution from China's government. Chinese students are aware that there are "official students" (spies) among them. Therefore, they tend to be careful what they say, whom they contact, and what beliefs they express. This may explain why some students who show interest in Christianity are very cautious in pursuing their interest, and why those who make Christian commitments often want to keep their faith secret.

Being an Effective Christian Witness

First Be a Friend

Street evangelism, where Christians approach people and ask such questions as, “Do you believe in the Bible?” or “Do you know if you’ll go to heaven when you die?” may be a common practice in America, but to the Chinese this witnessing approach is unacceptable. Before a Chinese student is likely to answer such questions, he or she will ask: “Do I know you?”

America’s “fast” approach to food, entertainment, and even friendship doesn’t translate well to the Chinese. They don’t consider “acquaintances” as “friends.” To most Chinese students, friendship is the result of time and patience, which produces mutual trust. Friendship is also the willingness to sacrifice one’s own interest to meet the other’s needs.

For example, friends show a sincere interest in each other, asking such questions as: “How are you really doing?” Friends wait for a response. In befriending Chinese students, find out about their personal lives and involve them in yours. Invite them over for meals; introduce them to your friends.

Friendship Before Evangelism

A danger in any friendship evangelism ministry is the tendency to jump to the evangelism part too soon. This may have disastrous consequences on the friendship. The openness of many Chinese to Christianity, particularly after the Beijing massacre, should never be misinterpreted as a hunger for the Gospel. In many cases, this openness was more a result of political, social, and personal concern than solely a spiritual awakening.

Christians need to be extra sensitive to the needs of these students—they may be in a vulnerable position, but we mustn’t take advantage of them. Ministry opportunities will become obvious, as long as we are patient and learn to demonstrate to the students our sincere love and concern for their daily needs.

Christians are called to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. God wants us to be among nonbelievers to influence them daily, consistently, prayerfully, humbly, and bravely by shining His life-changing light, given by God alone. Jesus says: “You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14, 16).

One-to-One Contact

Ministry among Chinese students must be unique to individuals and to Chinese culture. In America, public evangelism and meetings such as crusades, intensive Bible studies, and neighborhood outreach programs are very popular. These activities, however, tend to be ineffective among Chinese students, at least in the early stages of friendship.

Public professions of faith are difficult—if not impossible—for many students. However, some Chinese have been known to say, “If I can stay in America permanently, I wouldn’t mind becoming a Christian, because it doesn’t make too much difference in this country if you are a Christian or not.” Again, the reasons for this fear relate to culture and politics. Many Chinese are afraid of “losing face” or being ridiculed, or fear persecution from China’s government. You may find that ministry among Chinese students is much more effective one-to-one. Spend time with your friend to understand what he or she is really thinking about Christianity and the problems or doubts he or she may have. In doing so, you may be able to liberate your Chinese friend from fear and truly meet his or her physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

Live Out the Christian Life

One impression some Chinese students have about Americans, particularly Christians, is that they have “big mouths but small hands.” To the Chinese it seems that Christians are very good at talking about their faith, but their actions fail to demonstrate it.

One Chinese student related his experience with Christians: “Christians don’t do what they say every day. My car was stuck in the snow just in front of a church last Sunday. Although many people carrying Bibles saw me, no one stopped to give me a hand. It seemed to me that they were more concerned to get into the church on time.”

One major reason that the Chinese have lost confidence in the Communist Party is because of the poor testimony of its members. Confucius once said, “Don’t measure others by the standards you are unable to match yourself.” In other words: be an example. In Chinese culture, action is more important than words. In fact, Chinese people traditionally regard a person who talks too much as untrustworthy. It might be said that the Chinese prefer “down-to-earth” people.

In light of this, your Chinese friend may be slow to respond to the Gospel. Your response must be to “walk the talk,” live what you believe.

Affirm Christ's Transforming Power

To tell Chinese students they need to become Christians, to introduce them to the Bible, and to counsel them about how to love God and follow Jesus—all of these are not enough.

Your Chinese friend needs to learn how to apply Christianity to his or her own life—every day—and to the world in which we live.

Communism was such an initial success in China because of the economic and spiritual suffering millions of Chinese were experiencing. Marxism taught the value of human power to solve social and political problems. It responded to the present needs of the Chinese people.

Sometimes Christians make the mistake of emphasizing the heavenly peace we will experience in eternity, more than the power and work of Jesus Christ in the present world. We say, “If you believe in Jesus, you will go to heaven when you die.” But the Chinese, influenced by the teachings of Confucianism and Marxism, believe that one’s obligation to society is more important than personal rights, and they value the practical “here and now” over any talk of heaven. Many Chinese, particularly students, are committed to family and to China; they want the best for both. These students not only want to know what Jesus can do for their individual soul in eternity, but what the Christian faith can contribute to their family and to China as a nation, “here and now.”

In his book, *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr focuses on the different models theologians have used throughout history to represent the relationship between Jesus Christ and culture. For the Chinese, an important one is: Christ the transformer of culture. Jesus Christ is Lord in heaven and King on earth—we are under His control, not Satan’s. Jesus has already intervened into human history, culture, and human life. And now, through His church, He is transforming the world. The Bible gives several examples of God’s work in our present world:

- Christ is concerned about our daily spiritual and physical needs (Matt. 6:10-13).
- Our relationship with our government should reflect our relationship to God (Rom. 13:1-3).
- We are commanded to have an active impact in society (Matt. 5:13-16).

Christians, whether Chinese or American, have a role to play in impacting the society in which we live. We should be involved in social change and causes for justice, democracy, and freedom, in all areas of human life. Christians have responsibilities in this world.

Care for the Student's Family

Estimates put the number of Chinese students in America at around 64,000, but this does not take into account a greater number of Chinese here who are spouses and family of these students. More than 60 percent of the Chinese students in the United States have brought along their spouses and families. In most cases, these spouses are women. Here are some facts about these student spouses:

- Most are college graduates.
- Many worked in China as teachers, engineers, technicians, and in many of the science fields.
- Most have been unable to continue their education in America because of financial difficulties. But some are part- or full-time students themselves.
- Even more so than the students, these spouses tend to experience loneliness and isolation while here in the United States. This may be because of poor language skills, lack of transportation, caring for children, and the inability to obtain meaningful employment.

Christians working with Chinese students should seriously consider ministry among these spouses and families.

In fact, these spouses are often more responsive to the Gospel, will be more active in Bible study and other activities, and may become the best Christian witnesses to their husbands or wives.

Utilization of Chinese Student Believers

Approximately five percent of the Chinese students in America are Christians. Although a small number, the potential impact of their witness should not be ignored.

These Christian students come from two different backgrounds. Less than one percent of the students came as Christians from China, were raised in Christian families, and/or were involved in China's house churches or the Three-Self church movement. These students tend to have strong and often dramatic testimonies of faith due to religious and political persecution in China, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. Most of the Chinese student Christians, however, became Christians after their arrival in the United States.

These Chinese Christians are scattered across hundreds of college and university campuses in the country. Some are outgoing, expressive witnesses of Christ, eager to evangelize their fellow students. Other Chinese Christians will tend to be reserved and very cautious about publicizing their faith.

In working among Chinese students, American Christians should also encourage Chinese Christians—disciple and help them, so they in turn can disciple others. These Christian students can help us to be wise and sensitive witnesses of Christ; they may be an invaluable bridge—and personal witness—to other Chinese students.

Cooperation with the Chinese Church

Successful ministry among international students requires the support and partnership of the local church. This is especially true of the Chinese church. In the United States, the number of Chinese churches has been doubling every decade since the 60s.. Chinese churches have joined other Christians in reaching out to students from the People's Republic of China.

Chinese churches can be one of the best forms of witness and discipleship for Chinese students. The church can help provide cultural insight, language assistance, and the support of other Chinese for more sensitive and effective ministry among students. And the church may provide a worship environment that the student may find more comfortable and will need to become accustomed to before returning home.

Unfortunately, you may experience some reservations from both the church and the students regarding ministry involvement with each other and with you. This may be related to distrust between Communist and non-Communist Chinese, the student's fear of a public interest or witness leading to ridicule here or to persecution back in China, and the church's reluctance to cooperate with individuals or groups other than Chinese.

Thus, part of your ministry may be to encourage the Chinese church and its leadership to join in the vision of reaching out to these students. Pray that the Lord will give a sense of humility and compassion first to yourself, and then to both the church and students, opening doors for ministry.

Some Mistakes to Avoid

Poor Understanding of Culture

Traditional ministry approaches will not work with Chinese students. In humility, Christians must be willing to learn first from our Chinese friends, to “be a Chinese” and adapt ourselves to the Chinese way of thinking. While it is true that an American can never truly be Chinese, we must try. This is reflected in the spirit of the apostle Paul’s witness in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

Ideological Ignorance

In addition to Chinese culture, many Americans have little or no understanding of the major Chinese ideologies of Confucianism and Communism. This is especially tragic among Christians trying to reach out to Chinese students. One tendency is to attack these philosophies without understanding them or their impact on the Chinese way of thinking. Our witness may be null and void if we are not prepared to respond with some knowledge of their ideologies.

Poor Representation of the Gospel

In our efforts to lead our Chinese friends to Christ, our American-style of aggressiveness, goal-oriented approach, and point-by-point presentation process may give an incorrect impression of Christianity. Sometimes students will respond positively out of politeness, or a fear of being embarrassed, or even not wanting to hurt our feelings. Students will respond as they think we want them to respond, but they still don’t have a clear idea of what being a Christian is all about.

For example, when Chinese students say “yes,” they may not be responding positively or with affirmation. Instead, their answer may really mean “yes or no.” This behavior is partly attributed to the influence of Confucianism, in which many Chinese believe that direct confrontation or a public disagreement is improper ethical conduct.

Our Gospel presentations to Chinese students must be personal, not mechanical or abstract. The best witness is personal experience, emphasizing why your relationship with God is important. As Chinese are often more attuned to group-consciousness and family-orientation, discuss God’s love and the intimate fellowship among believers, rather than the fear of death, hell, or the attractiveness of heaven.

Too Much Activity

Never forget that Chinese students may come to the United States with many responsibilities, including school, studies, family, jobs, and so forth. Most often these students are busy, with limited time for extracurricular activities.

In befriending and ministering to these students, be sensitive to their needs. Try not to arrange meetings and appointments with them without first checking the student's schedule. And keep activities short, or run the risk of giving the impression that you are wasting their time.

Keep in mind that for Chinese students, conversation and the exchange of ideas may be more important than activities. You don't always have to do something special. Your friends may enjoy the chance just to relax and "feel at home."

For Further Information

The following resources and materials may prove helpful as you share the Good News of Jesus Christ with an international student from the People's Republic of China.

Other Ministries that Work with Chinese International Students

Ambassadors for Christ
21 Ambassador Dr., Paradise, PA 17562
(717) 687-8564
www.afcinc.org

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707-7895
(608) 274-9001
www.intervarsity.org

Overseas Missionary Fellowship
10 West Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120
1 (800) 422-5330
www.omf.org

Ministries that Provide Chinese Bible Translations

American Bible Society
1865 Broadway, New York, NY 10023
(212) 408-1200
www.americanbible.org

Christian Renewal Ministries
200 N. Main Street, Milltown, NJ 08850
(732) 828-4545
www.crmnj.org

International Bible Society
1820 Jet Stream Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80921
(719) 488-9200
www.ibs.org

General Information about the People's Republic of China

Covell, Ralph. *Confucius, the Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*. New York. Orbis, 1986.

DeKeijzer, Arne J., and Kaplan, Frederic M. *The China Guidebook*. New York. Eurasia Press, 1986.

Hing, Liang. *Son of the Revolution*. Knopf Publishers.

Hsu, Francis L. K. *Americans & Chinese: Passage to Differences*. Honolulu, Hawaii. University of Hawaii, 1981.

Tey, David Hok, *Chinese Culture and the Bible*. Here's Life Publishers.

Instructional Materials for Christians

Aldrich, Joseph C., *Life-Style Evangelism*. Portland, Ore. Multnomah Press, 1981. (See also audiotope package by same name.)

Dyrness, William. *Christian Apologetics in a World Community*. Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Press, 1983.

Obien, Frank. *Building Bridges of Love*. San Bernardino, Calif. Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc.

Petersen, Jim. *Living Proof*. Colorado Springs, Colo. NavPress, 1989.

Seamands, John T. *Tell it Well: Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures*. Kansas City, Mo. Beacon Hill Press, 1981.

Shelley, Bruce L. *Christian Theology in Plain Language*. Waco, Tex. Word Books, 1985.

Books/Periodicals to Share with Chinese Students

Demarest, Bruce. *Who Is Jesus?* Monterey Park, Calif. Living Spring Publications, 1988. (Available in Chinese.)

Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York. MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1943. (Available in Chinese.)

McDowell, Josh. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. San Bernardino, Calif. Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1972. (Available in Chinese.)

Overseas Campus (Magazine), 1753 Cabrillo Ave., Torrance, CA 90501, (310) 328-8200,
www.oc.org

Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Press, 1973.

Schaeffer, Francis. *How Should We Then Live?* Westchester, Ill. Crossway Books, 1983.
(Available in Chinese.)

Stott, John R. W. *Basic Christianity*. Grand Rapids, Mich. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958.
(Available in Chinese.)

Tong, Peter. *Life and Life*. Taipei, Taiwan. Campus Evangelical Fellowship, 1983. (Available in Chinese.)

Tong, Stephen. *The Nature of God*. Taipei, Taiwan. Campus Evangelical Fellowship, 1983.
(Available in Chinese.)

Tong. *The Nature of Man*. Taipei, Taiwan. Campus Evangelical Fellowship, 1983. (Available in Chinese.)

Zongren, Liu. *Two Years in the Melting Pot*. San Francisco, Calif. China Books and Periodicals, Inc. 1984.

Materials Available from ISI

Booklets:

Friendship

Becoming a Friend with an International Student

Evangelism

Knowing God Personally tract

How to Share the Good News with Your International Friend

How to Share the Good News with Your Muslim Friend

Reaching Students from the People's Republic of China

How to Share the Good News with Your African Friend

How to Share the Good News with Your Japanese Friend

Discipleship

How to Study the Bible with Your International Friend

Re-entry/Follow-up

Preparing Your International Friend for Life Back Home

Think Home

Handbooks:

An American Friend Handbook
How to Survive in the U.S.: A Handbook for Internationals

Books:

Healing the Broken Family of Abraham
The World At Your Door
The Compact Guide to World Religions

Bible Studies:

I AM
Jesus the Liberator
Discovering God
Walking with God
Putting God First
Sharing God with Others
Meeting God
Growing Strong to Serve
The Way to Life (Available in English, Contemporary Chinese and Traditional Chinese)

Country Profiles:

People's Republic of China
Japan
Taiwan
India
South Korea
Malaysia
Hong Kong
Pakistan
Thailand
Indonesia

Religion Profiles:

Buddhism
Animism
Islam
Hinduism
Marxism
Shinto
Judaism and the Jewish People
Secularism
World Religions Overview
How Can I Know the Bible is the Word of God?
Is Jesus the Only Way to God?

Videos:

Getting Started with ISI (15 minutes) tells you how to begin your own ministry to international students.

New Beginnings, (15 minutes per program), a series of seven lessons designed for small-group study with new Christians. Discussion guide also available.

Sharing Your Faith through ISI (44 minutes) provides awareness of and practical help for addressing the variety of issues that arise when sharing your faith with international students.

The Church and ISI (4 minute or 7.5 minute format) is designed for use in churches to share the vision and recruit volunteers for your ministry. It also includes a segment with leaders from

ISI and partnering organizations challenging viewers to become personally involved in the task.

Welcome Home (18 minutes) shares the stories of several returnees and the difficulties they experienced when going back home. Practical awareness and advice for returnees.

You Have a Friend in ISI (6.5 minutes) is designed for a student audience, sharing how ISI can help students when they first come to the U.S.

Friendship Partner Training is for the person who wants to train a group to be Friendship Partners. This package Includes a 55 minute video, a complete trainer's manual, and a power-point presentation.

Friendship Partner Individual Training DVD is for the person who can't attend a Friendship Partner Training in a live format. You will receive the training needed to be an effective friend to an international student in your area.

About the Author

Rev. Joshua Zhong was born and raised in mainland China. He became a Christian in 1982 through the witness of an American tourist. In the late 1980s, after completing his undergraduate studies, Joshua came to the United States to study philosophy of religion.

Immediately after the Beijing massacre on June 4, 1989, Joshua became national coordinator of the Chinese Student Emergency Fund, established by International Students, Inc., to help the 40,000 Chinese students and visiting scholars in the United States with emergency needs resulting from the massacre.

Joshua's vital contributions to ministry to mainland Chinese students include Chinese ministry research, training American staff members for effective service to mainland Chinese, and evangelizing Chinese students.

About International Students, Inc.

Founded in 1953, International Students, Inc. (ISI), is a nondenominational, non-profit Christian ministry that exists to serve international students studying here in the United States.

Working in cooperation with local churches and others, ISI seeks to enlist, educate, and coordinate the ministry efforts of evangelical Christians to befriend international students and, through friendship evangelism, share with them the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, ISI promotes Bible study and other discipleship programs for international students, helping to equip them to become effective Christian servants when they return to their home countries.

Headquartered in Colorado Springs, ISI coordinates more than 150 field staff members strategically working in more than 285 campus-based and church-based ministry locations in the United States. Affiliated ministries are located in Canada, Europe, and Asia.

If you would like more information or assistance, please contact:

International Students, Inc.

P.O. Box C

Colorado Springs, CO 80901

Toll Free: 1-800-ISI-TEAM

Phone: (719) 576-2700; *Fax:* (719) 576-5363

Email: team@isionline.org; www.isionline.org

For students: www.internationalstudents.org

ISI's Mission

ISI exists to share Christ's love with international students and to equip them for effective service in cooperation with the local church and others.

Your Response

YES! I'd like more information on international student ministry!

- ☐ Please send information on how I can become involved in the ministry of ISI.
- ☐ I'd like my church or group to view the ISI video, *The Church and ISI*.
- ☐ I'd like to explore the possibility of inviting a special speaker from ISI to challenge my church.
- ☐ Please send me a complete list of ministry materials available from ISI.
- ☐ Other _____

Name (Rev., Dr., Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss): _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Phone (work): (____) _____ (home): (____) _____

Best time to call: _____ Fax (if applicable): _____

Email address (if applicable): _____

Please cut and mail to: International Students, Inc., P.O. Box C, Colorado Springs, CO 80901