

# Returning to China: Keys to Successful Re-Entry

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*Returning to China: Keys to Successful Re-Entry*  
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## Welcome!

Dear Returnee Student,


First, I want to congratulate you on your accomplishment as an international student. It takes courage, perseverance, and a lot of hard work to adjust to another culture and achieve what you have achieved. As a previous international student myself, I know it has been a lonely and tough road at times, but you have succeeded. Well done!

Your time as a student or scholar overseas has forever changed the way you see yourself, others, and the world around you. These experiences have given you a greater understanding of other cultures, and a larger capacity to relate to people from other parts of the world. But now you are returning home, back to the familiar faces, places, smells and sounds of your home culture. The adventure of leaving your culture to study abroad is over. The excitement of returning home is here.

No doubt many questions are going through your mind. *What will it be like when I get back home? What are my family and friends up to? What new opportunities will I encounter? What new challenges will I face?* And of course, there is the deep desire to make a difference with the new knowledge and skills you have gained—a desire to make your environment, your country, and the world a better place to live.

Returning home represents a new chapter in your life. There will be happy moments, as well as unexpected challenges. The insights, practical advice, and stories shared by other returnee students throughout the pages of this booklet are offered as a resource to aid you in your own re-entry process. I hope you find these reflections and suggestions both helpful and encouraging. May you experience a life full of peace, purpose, and destiny.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Douglas Shaw". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

Dr. Douglas Shaw  
President, ISI

## **Introduction**

Studying abroad provides international students and scholars the opportunity to expand their education and develop cross-cultural skills with the hope for greater career advancement and influence as they return home to China. The reality is that when students return to their home country, things aren't always what they expected.

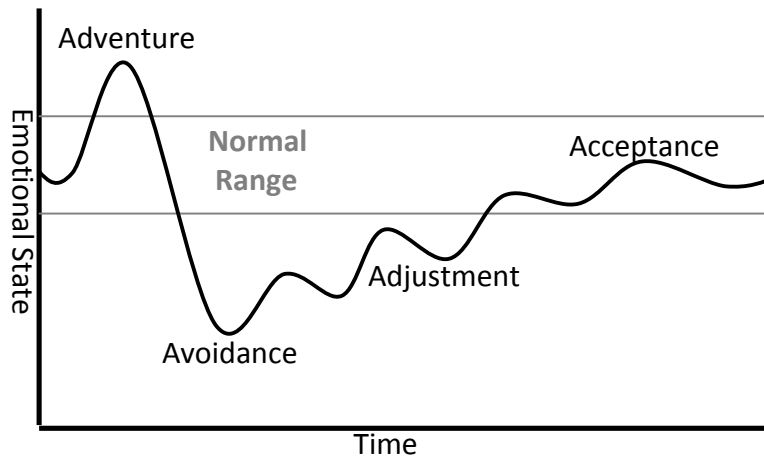
"I expected that I could do something different...have some new ideas...add some better services for my clients," said Bao Yu, a returnee from Mongolia. Mai, a returnee from Hunan Province said, "I thought having studied abroad would give me an advantage and make it easier to find a job." Song, a returnee from Shanghai, said, "This was the biggest adjustment. I could never have expected that my new position would be so stressful, so demanding... It has almost made me sick." Still other students found jealousy from peers and supervisors, increased pressures from parents and family, and changes in their own thinking which caused confusion and depression.

Depending on how long they lived overseas, students such as Bao Yu, Mai and Song have discovered that their worldview has changed. They have acquired some new views and question some previously held views. The changes within them, as well as the changes that have taken place in their home countries while they were away, presented unexpected challenges when they returned. In addition, because many students grew accustomed to having more personal space and freedom while living abroad, they

found themselves frustrated by the expectations of family and friends.

Many students are surprised to find that “reverse culture shock” (re-adapting to their culture back home) is more difficult or challenging than the culture shock experienced when they arrived in their host country.

### Reverse Culture Shock Diagram



When students who return to their home countries (returnees) understand and know how to respond to these challenges ahead of time, they will make their re-entry process much more successful and pleasant. This document was written to provide returnees with insights and practical suggestions for successful re-entry into their home culture by offering new perspectives and new approaches on their different challenges.



Many of the questions and recommendations offered here were provided by previous returnees who have successfully conquered their re-entry challenges and have re-integrated into the Chinese culture.

## **Overview**

The experience of living and studying abroad has changed the returnee's life in many ways. In this document we will focus on some of the important challenges returnees face in the following dimensions of their lives:

- personal challenges
- marriage challenges
- family challenges
- career challenges
- cultural challenges

## **Definitions**

- Home country/culture: the country or culture of a student's origin.
- Host country/culture: the foreign country or culture where a student studies.
- Re-entry: the process of returning and adapting once again to the home culture.
- Returnee: a student who has studied in a foreign country and is returning to his or her country of origin.

## Personal Challenges

When Keung, a student from Beijing, returned to his home he was not prepared for the changes he encountered. "After I came back I got in extremely big traffic jams. In the U.S., we have a traffic jam sometimes, but not so terrible... When you walk on the streets, you don't know anyone. In [the city where he lived in the U.S.] you have more chances to meet people and get together. Because here there are more people, so it's very hard to meet someone here. If you meet someone all the time, you get familiar with each other. I think the reason we can make friends in the classroom, is that we meet always in the same [place] so we get more chance to be familiar with each other. ... [In Beijing] it's very hard to make new friends."

Another returnee, Chu-hua was surprised also by the pace of life in Shanghai. She explained, "When I first got to Shanghai, it was very scary to go across the road with the stroller. ... There is always construction work on the sidewalk or sometime some cars parking on the sidewalk, and I felt it was crazy! ... They use baby strollers a lot [in the city where she lived in the U.S.] but **not** in Shanghai. So it is hard to walk outside with strollers. ... The [pace of] life is very fast. In the supermarket you can feel many people are very impatient to you."

Jia-li, a returnee from Taipei, found it difficult to move in with her family again. She had her own personal space for two years in the U.S. Her main reason for moving back with her parents was to save money and help her parents, but she lost her own personal space

because she had to stay in the same room as her sisters. She said that her sisters, who are both older than she is, see her as simply one of the group. So they can do anything without asking her first, and that was her biggest challenge.

Returnees like Keung, Chu-hua and Jia-li experienced personal challenges common to many returnees. These challenges mostly affect returnees personally but do not necessarily affect others (at least not directly). They include issues such as “how to share their overseas experiences with others,” or “how to deal with others’ expectations when they return home,” and “how to deal with the feelings of being ‘out of place’ in their home culture.”

Following are some key issues returnees have identified and suggestions provided by other returnees as well as experts in cross-cultural situations:

***How can I effectively share my overseas experience with my family, friends, and work colleagues?***

What has been found to work well is to share when **they** show interest. It’s important not to overwhelm friends, coworkers and family members by giving them too much information. Just share a little at a time. Be sure not to compare your overseas experiences with the same in your home culture, and don’t criticize things at home. You don’t want to offend people or cause them to feel defensive. Try to be balanced about things you share; tell about positive experiences as well as difficult ones.

***How can I minimize the experience of “reverse culture shock” as I return to my home country?***

Staying in contact with friends and family back home while you are overseas by phone, email, Skype, etc, can be helpful in minimizing reverse culture shock when you return home. Following the news, changes and important events taking place in your country while you’re gone through reading or watching news programs available via the Internet can also be very helpful. In addition, it is important to know what the cycle and symptoms of reverse culture shock look like (see diagram on page 8). Understanding this is an important part of successfully working through reverse culture shock. Regularly evaluate yourself after returning home to check for signs or symptoms of reverse culture shock. Some returnees have found that writing in a journal is a good way to deal with their feelings and see themselves progress through the different stages of reentry.

***What can I do to effectively readjust to my culture back home?***

Make efforts to get reacquainted with family and friends. Relationships are the most important dimension of any cultural adjustment. Consider how your philosophy and outlook on life has changed and how this new perspective needs to integrate (fit in) with your home culture. Don’t be in a hurry. Readjusting takes time; be patient with the process. If possible, stay connected with the friends you made back in your host country. These relationships can help provide stability during your re-entry process.

***How do I deal with the problem of comparing my home culture with my host culture?***

Remember first of all that all cultures are different with both positive and negative characteristics in each. It is helpful to be able to appreciate your host culture without comparing it to your home culture. It is also important to evaluate and adjust your expectations of your home culture. Focus on the positives of your culture, not the negatives. You may see things that you could do to improve your culture or situation back home, but look for positive ways to improve these areas.

Zhang Yimou, a returnee, said, "Some people are hypercritical...they find what is wrong, they can only see what is wrong. But if you think everything is wrong, I think it is terrible; you don't do your best to change it. You only think it's wrong and you become angrier and angrier. ... But you should do something. You should learn from the States and learn to change something ... do good for your country. ... You should love your country. It's your hometown. If you become too critical, you should put more energy to do good for your country."

***How do I deal with the feelings of being "different" or "out of place" in my home culture?***

Keep in mind that your worldview has expanded to include values from your home culture as well as values from your host culture. It's normal to feel different or out of place, but recognize that you are now a trans-cultural person. You are no longer just "yellow" (home culture) and not fully "blue" (host

culture) but “green” (a blend of both cultures). You are uniquely equipped to understand and form “bridges” or “links” between people of different cultures (businesses, corporations, etc.). Try to identify the changes that have taken place in your values and worldview. Identify ways your new perspectives can positively contribute to people and situations in your home culture. Celebrate the positive changes; be aware of the negative changes.

***How do I deal with feelings of being “marginalized” by my family and friends? They say I’m not like them anymore.***

This also is normal. Remember, you have changed and so have they—but not in the same way. So expect to have different perspectives, and seek to learn from each other. Identify situations and relationships where you can be a “bridge-builder” between different viewpoints or cultures. Reach out to and befriend other foreigners (trans-cultural people) in your home country or wherever you go.

Dewei, a returnee, describes how things may lead up to your feelings of being marginalized, “Living environment and amenities are also different. [Returnee] students might even find that the same home that they have lived for years all of sudden became unlivable. Room temperature is swinging up and down. Hot water is not immediately available or shower is too cold in wintertime, etc. Please remember, your body also needs time, and it will adjust accordingly. Don’t show your unhappiness [about] those things to your parents. They might not

feel what your body feels. Instead, they will interpret as a sign that you are leaving them emotionally.”

***How do I cope with the busy or demanding pace of life and work back home (especially in big cities)?***

Prioritize. Invest in your relationships by making time for them. Look for ways that you can manage your time better. As much as possible, include rest and exercise in your schedule.

***How do I balance my priorities in life?***

First identify or clarify what your priorities or goals are. Next, decide which priorities are higher and which are lower in importance. Identify goals for each area of priority. Then, decide what action steps you will take to achieve your goals. Finally, do regular reviews of your progress toward achieving your goals and make appropriate changes.

***How do I deal with the sense of loss of identity or role in society?***

Keep in mind this often happens to people who leave their home culture for an extended time. Think about the ways you have changed or grown (both positive and negative). Then, look for ways or places where your experience can make a positive contribution now.

***How do I deal with the sense of loss of personal freedom and autonomy?***

This often happens when you go from an individualistic society (Western culture) to a more



collectivistic society (Eastern culture). Once you recognize that this sense of loss is normal, look for a solution by trying to find a place and time when you can consistently have time alone to reflect and plan. Identify the strengths of both the collectivistic as well as the individualistic models of society. Explore ways you can impact and improve people's lives in and through the context or environment of community.

***How do I deal with others' expectations of me?***

Try to identify and understand what those expectations are and where they are coming from. If possible, have a conversation with the individual to clarify what their expectations are. Recognize which expectations are legitimate, and if there is a way you can reasonably meet those expectations. If you cannot, think of ways you could respectfully communicate that you are not able to meet that person's expectations.

***How can I use my experiences to help other students who are returning to China?***

You are in a unique situation to be able to help other students who are returning to China, with the re-entry challenges they are facing, or will face.

- First, identify the challenges you experienced in your own re-entry process, and how you got through those challenges (what worked and what didn't work).
- Find out what your returnee friends' needs are and how you can be of help or assistance as they go through their re-entry adjustment process.

- Share with them the adjustments you went through and what you learned through the process (what worked for you and what didn't work).
- Help connect them with other returnees who can provide encouragement, understanding, and input as they go through their re-entry adjustments.
- Direct them to resources that were helpful to you in your re-entry process.

Returnees face many changes, and personal challenges adapting to those changes, when they return to their home countries. While it is true that change can cause stress, it is also believed that stress isn't what harms us but our negative reaction to that stress. Hans Selye, a pioneering endocrinologist who first invented the term, "stress" said, "***Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one.***" Recognizing that change is a stressor, and looking for positive ways to adapt to change will help to ease your transition experience upon returning home. In the case of Bao Yu, she is using techniques learned in the U.S. to help her clients. Although she expected that she would also be able to share her new ideas with her colleagues at the university where she teaches, she wasn't given the opportunity. She has adapted, however, and says, "But in my class now I will tell my students what I have learned there in my courses there—so it is useful."

## **Marriage Challenges**

If you are a married returnee student, you will most likely experience some additional challenges that are unique to being married. This is true whether you went to your host country as a married person, or you got married while you were in your host country. You and your spouse will adjust to returning in different ways and at different rates. Bao Yu described how her husband had more difficulty in some ways than she did, "He has the street-thinking style and is easy to be angry. He couldn't adjust to the traffic, to the amount of people."

Sometimes the adjustments are greater if you got married away from home. Or if you are not yet married as you return home, you may experience family pressure to get married right away. Ching Lan, a student from Taipei, returned to her home and found that her parents expected her to get married and have children as soon as possible. They believed that she was wasting time being single. Jia-Li also felt pressure from her mother to get married when she returned from the U.S. She shared that other relatives tried to arrange marriages for her. Zhin, another returnee, said, "Everyone seems to be in such a hurry to get married. They will set you up with dates and urge you to get serious fast. This is so bad, in my opinion. I see so many people rush into things because of this pressure."

### ***How do I deal with the pressure to get married?***

Understand that family members and relatives mean well. It might be helpful to share with your family and

relatives that you need time to adjust first to being back home, and to the new challenges you are facing, before getting serious about marriage. Focus on building encouraging friendships with same-gender peers and quality friendships with opposite-gender peers.

***How can I find a good husband/wife?***

Before you decide to “find” a good husband or wife, you should think long and hard about whether or not you are ready for marriage. Ask yourself some important questions:

- Am I prepared to be a good marriage partner?
- Have I resolved my past (my failures, others’ failures, etc.)?
- Have I understood, and learned to conquer my character or moral flaws?
- Am I prepared for the future (finances, goals, etc.)?

If you cannot answer these questions with a “yes,” then perhaps you need to consider working on these issues in order to be as emotionally and mentally healthy as you can before pursuing marriage.

Marriage life can be beautiful, but it takes work to live with someone harmoniously. If you **can** answer “yes” to these questions, then it would be helpful for you to think about the following questions:

- Is the person I’m interested in ready for marriage?

- Do they have a good concept of themselves (do they like themselves)?
- Have they resolved their past (their failures, others' failures?)
- Have they understood and learned to conquer their character or moral flaws?

Again, if you cannot answer these questions with a “yes,” then you should consider waiting and perhaps working with your potential partner to address these issues. Entering the union of marriage as two mature and emotionally healthy people will give your marriage a better chance of success than dealing with unresolved mental and emotional pain and problems from the past.

***How do I deal with the frustration or disappointment of not being able to get pregnant?***

See your physician for help with determining if there are any biological factors contributing to this problem. Talk to people you know who have experienced this same challenge, to get their input and perspective.

***What kind of challenges could I experience returning to my culture as a married person if I left as a single person?***

Recognize that your parents and family may be feeling left out, or may resent that you got married away from home. Help your parents experience what they missed by sharing with them how you met your spouse and why you decided to get married away from home.

Reassure them that you were not trying to ignore them or exclude them. Perhaps holding a special ceremony with family and invited friends to celebrate your wedding with them may help them to experience what they missed. You may want to plan an “open house” party where your friends and family can meet your spouse (include a video or slide show of your wedding, etc.). Just keep in mind that it will take time for your family and spouse to get acquainted and become comfortable with each other.

***How can I become a better spouse (husband or wife)?***

Keeping communication open is the most important aspect of a good marriage. When one partner stops talking or listening, the marriage becomes one-sided, unbalanced and difficult. Some couples find that once they return to their homes the pace becomes so busy in their workplace that they don't even have the time or energy to talk to their spouse. (See the previous section's question, “How do I balance my priorities in life?”) Many books have been written on the topic of building a strong marriage. (See Resource List for titles and links.) One international organization, whose mission it is to strengthen marriages (United Marriage Encounter), uses journaling as a tool. Couples write letters to each other in their journals and share them together. It sounds basic, but it is a powerful tool that can be very helpful in opening up communication and strengthening a marriage.

Returnees face many personal challenges as they re-adjust to life and culture in their home countries. Expressing understanding to family members that

may be putting social pressures on you as a newly returned student could help improve the situation. Ching Lan understood that her parents felt their own lives would only be complete if they saw her married with children. Jia Li said that those pressures eased after some time. Returnees who are married may find that dealing with the challenges of reverse culture shock with a partner may complicate matters as they react to changes differently. But it also can ease their burden as they have someone who understands what they are going through at their side. *For more help on this issue, see the Resource section at the end of this text.*





## Family Challenges

In addition to personal and marriage challenges during the re-entry process, many students also experience family challenges when they return home. Bao Yu was one such returnee who saw the difficulties her young daughter had to go through. “Before [my daughter] went abroad, she was one of the best students,” Bao Yu said, “But when she came back, she was at the bottom. Then after a few months she worked up to the medium. She had to work hard to get back to that. Yes, it was hard for her.”

Some returnees find that the independence and freedom they enjoyed in their host country may be restricted by well-meaning family members. Jun, a returnee in Taipei explained, “Many Taiwanese students are not really living their own lives, but living for their parents.” This may be because they are going into a field of study that their parents have chosen for them instead of a field they have an interest in. Jun also had trouble with having to listen to other people’s ideas and going along with them so that she would not appear to be impolite or disrespectful. There were many times when she wanted to go against the group and make a different decision.

Some returnees also realized that the way they view their relatives and how they relate to them has changed. Jia-Li from Taipei explained, “Before I went to the States, I didn’t really see people as individuals... I saw people as units—families, etc. But after the U.S., I started to see people as individuals. It made me feel

not as accepted by my culture. I felt like a foreigner.” Jia-Li says that she did feel better again, and now she feels she can bridge between the two cultures, seeing both sides and seeing things at home the way they were before. However her feelings about privacy have changed permanently. She explains about what happened when she went to a family wedding celebration, “One of my cousins asked about my family. I didn’t want to tell him, felt it was too private. Before, I would have shared; but not anymore.”

Following are some questions that other returnees have had. Perhaps you’ve had the same and wondered what solutions there might be.

***How do I deal with my parents’ different expectations or views?***

First of all, it is important that you treat your parents with honor and respect. Let them know how your feelings for them have not changed even if they see changes in you. Share with them your hopes and dreams, and ask them for their thoughts and counsel.

***How do I deal with distance or isolation (loneliness) from my family?***

As your family members go through an adjustment period with your return, you may feel that you are no longer in the same place as when you left. Take time to reestablish your relationships. And at the same time, make new friends and new relationships. Get to know people around you. Get involved in a local “community” (group) with interests that you share. It

is helpful to take the focus off of yourself, and look for ways to help those around you.

***How can I become a better parent?***

Identify attitudes and actions that you believe are helpful and those that are hurtful in parenting. Remember ways that your parents helped you and ways that were hurtful to you. Discuss with other parents ways they think are good and bad parenting attitudes and behaviors. Decide on the attitudes and actions you want to develop and practice in your parenting. Then, put together a plan that you will use to become a better parent. Evaluate yourself regularly to see how well you are doing in following your parenting plan. Ask people you trust to give you honest feedback on how you are doing as a parent (and where you could improve).

***How do I help my child adjust to life back home?***

Talk with your child on a regular basis about how he/she is doing (what struggles they might be having) with school responsibilities or relationships with peers during this transition period. Ask your child how you can help with their transition challenges. Identify and discuss with your child some goals they can work towards during this transition time, and reassure him/her that you are there to help. Remind your child that he/she is special and that you believe in him/her.

As the member of a family, returnees must accept that the changes they themselves experience can have an effect on other family members around them. Keeping

an open mind and heart, being patient, reflective and sensitive to others can help improve the transition into the lives of friends and family back home.

Dewei reminded returnees that social relationships are different in China than in the U.S. “The best thing that you can do is that to try to give some time for yourself to adjust back in [to relationships in China],” he explained. “The worst thing that you can do is to immediately express discontent and [distance] yourself away from even friendly gestures.”

Dewei also made this recommendation: “Whatever situation you find yourself in when you go back, maintain a strong relationship with your family. Your Chinese parents are probably the only people that could provide you with unconditional support under any circumstances. They could be the ultimate backup when you most need it even if they do not speak the same language and think the same way as you do now.”

## Career Challenges

The very reason Chinese students want to study overseas is to expand their educational experience, with the hope of being able to get a better job when they return home. This does not always happen this way. They may have to take an average job until something better becomes available. In fact, some returnee students have experienced difficulty getting a job at all. This can be frustrating and very disappointing. Lin-Lin, a professor who returned to her home in China, said, "I thought having studied abroad would give me an advantage and make it easier to find a job...but in fact it was very hard."

In addition, sometimes returnee students experience jealousy and unkindness from colleagues at work because they did not get to study abroad. Xin, a returnee professor, said, "I had to start over establishing labs, getting students, applying for grants, and dealing with the jealousy of superiors. It made everything difficult for me."

Another returnee, Si, a returnee from Shanghai, said, "In China, many people have two faces. I have definitely had to deal with this in the workplace."

Song, another returnee from Shanghai, was surprised at the amount of work required of her. "This was the biggest adjustment. I could never have expected that my new position would be so stressful, so demanding, take so much from me," she said, "It has almost made me sick, but I think I am getting adjusted to it now."

Zhin, a returnee who had studied in California, said, “Do not expect a high salary when you first come back; they do not value expat [ex patriot] returnees as much as before unless you have a certain connection who can introduce you to a great job.”

Returnees are faced with many career-related challenges and questions. Some of these with suggested solutions follow:

***How do I find and get a good job (practical guidelines/skills)?***

In addition to looking for job openings on websites, it’s important to network with other professionals. Make contacts with people in the same field as you. If there are online communities in your field, join them. It’s true in many places that too often it is not what you know, but who you know that gets you a job. Jin, a returnee who had studied in the Monterey area, said, “If you want to go back to China for jobs after studying abroad, you must follow the situations in China closely and maintain good relations with friends in China. It will help you a lot when you are seeking a job in the future.”

Another returnee, Mei-Lien, also noticed difficulties in being away from home so long, “The longer you stay abroad, the smaller your social network in China might be,” she explained. “You cannot interact with your friends or make new friends across the borders as easily and frequently as before. When I returned to China, I realized that my circle of friends and acquaintances was small, and not having adequate local connections and resources became a

disadvantage and posed a challenge to my job hunting.”

Mei-Lien was able to find a solution for this challenge and had these recommendations for other returnees: “If you plan to return to China to live and work eventually, I suggest that you continue to maintain and expand your network in China when you are abroad. Do not stop putting effort in enlarging your “Inner Circle” or extending your network of social connections. Stay in touch with your former classmates, your friends, your professors, etc. and get to know more successful people through them. Make good use of the major online sites, such as LinkedIn, Sina Weibo, and famous Chinese SNS (kaixin001.com, renren.com). Perhaps the leads or experience that you gain from someone will land your dream job after you return to China.”

Mei-Lien also had these suggestions for returnees who expect to enter the workforce upon their return, “Studying abroad is no longer a rare experience for Chinese people. Therefore, a foreign degree is not as superior to a native degree as before. Real-world experience is more valued for a company based in China. In order to gain a competitive advantage over other local job seekers when you return, I suggest that you not return home immediately after completing your studies. Instead, you would better seize any opportunity to accumulate some work experience in American companies first. You can also learn the American’s advanced business management and organizational methods of efficiency through your job in the States; they can be the impressive

points to the Chinese recruiters when you sell yourself at a job interview in the future. Identify which field you want to work in and what strengths you have before you return to China. In other words, well prepare yourself for the highly competitive market before you return, i.e. resume, certificates, qualifications, skills, etc., to get a head start.”

***How do I deal with the intense competition in my work world (or school)?***

Here you will walk a fine line between demonstrating your skills and abilities to your superiors and at the same time experiencing jealousies and prejudices from your colleagues. Work hard. Do what is expected of you. When you have the opportunity, use humility in sharing what you have learned in your field.

Mei-Lien shared how she handled work-place competition: “In an American company, one’s capabilities and dedications are prized above anything else. Essentially, they determine your promotion potential. ... In most Chinese enterprises, whether you will be promoted or not depends on many factors other than your excellent ability, such as your age, your seniority, your relation with your superiors, your connections, your background, etc. Therefore, one’s motivation for hard work can sometimes be affected. To overcome this big difference, I had to first admit this reality, and then to pay special attention to my relations with colleagues. I was very cautious of giving offense to others. I kept a low profile at work, trying not to be a showman. On the other hand, I was proactive in assuming new responsibilities that would increase my promotion



potential, and I also found opportunities to discuss my career path with my supervisor in order to better understand which aspects I should strive for.”

***How do I deal with the pressure or expectation to cut corners and cheat in my job (i.e., how do I maintain integrity)?***

Show others that doing things right the first time prevents having to do them over again and wasting time and money. Cutting corners and being unethical are sure to have consequences sooner or later, consequences that could be embarrassing if not hurtful to you and the company in the long run.

***How do I deal with my work colleagues or supervisor prejudice/jealousy because of my study abroad?***

Remember to gently share what you have learned. Cong, a returnee from Beijing said, “Try to be humble in your company or in your job, not like, ‘I just came back from the U.S. (or from another country).’ It’s better to be humble. Humble. Not always saying, ‘America is something, America is good.’” Your colleagues may become defensive thinking that you think you know better than they do now. Recall information in the first chapter about sharing your overseas experience with others. Share a little at a time and only as much as they are interested in knowing. Share positive and negative aspects of the things you’ve learned, and show interest in the way **they** are doing things as well. In other words, don’t act like you know better, and continue to be a learner.

“A superior man is modest in his speech, but exceeds in his actions.” Confucius

***How do I (female) deal with prejudices by men against women in my work environment?***

This can be a very sensitive and frustrating situation for you that will probably take time and patience to change. The best way for you as a woman to prove that you are just as capable as a man in your job is for you to produce quality work. It will also be important, as much as possible, to maintain a positive, respectful attitude toward your colleagues, even toward the men who have prejudices against women. Your good work and positive attitude are the best answer to their negative views.

Career challenges can be among the most frustrating for returnees to face. They sacrificed much to live overseas and study, leaving behind loved ones and all that was familiar. They return to their home countries believing they have much to offer, to make a difference and help improve the lives of their people within their chosen fields or careers. Instead they may find rejection when jobs are not available or ridicule when jealousy and prejudice arise. Recognizing that you are not alone in these experiences and that your response can make a difference will help you to maintain the right perspective and to stay focused on what you can do to bring about positive change.

## **Cultural Challenges**

The first thing that Jun noticed when she returned to Taipei was the issue of personal space. "I had gotten used to living on my own. I had to learn to live with my parents again." The second thing she noticed was both the physical and mental difference in space between herself and others around her. The trains were very crowded. She also felt mentally crowded, unable to speak up about her own ideas. She worried about what other people would think about her and that they would not appreciate or respect her input.

Xiao-niao, another returnee, described the frustration and anger she experienced when first returning home, "I came home with another perspective (sharper and more critical-thinking oriented) thanks to broader access to information and the environment for free speech in U.S. However, it's tormenting to see how things really are and how good and strong everyday people are treated in my homeland."

You would not expect that going back to your culture of origin would present any significant re-entry challenges, but this is most often the case. Living in another culture has exposed you to ideas and values that are different from those you grew up with, sometimes very different. As a result, you may have decided to accept some of those new values and perspectives. This can result in different levels of conflict within you. Which value or idea is better? Which one will direct the decisions you make and the kinds of actions you will take? As a result of these new values and perspectives, you may also experience

conflict with others in your culture, and with how they believe and act, including family, friends, and work colleagues. For this reason, it is very important to understand how your views and attitudes have changed, and how you will relate to those in your culture who think and act differently. The following suggestions from previous returnees, and others, may be helpful to consider as you look for positive ways to re-integrate the “new you” into your home culture.

See the chart on the following page for a list of American/Western cultural values compared to Non-Western values.

***How should I process and respond to all the changes that have taken place in my culture?***

First of all, be patient with yourself. It takes time to re-adjust to changes that have happened in your culture, especially if you’ve been away for awhile. Find someone you trust that you can talk with about the changes you see, and how or why they came about. Remember that ISI staff may be able to put you into touch with other returnees who are in your area or are currently experiencing the same things you are. Try to identify how these changes make you feel (sad, angry, anxious, etc.) and why they make you feel that way. Adjusting is easier when you understand how things affect you and why. If appropriate, identify ways you can positively influence these areas (i.e., how you can contribute to positive change or help prevent negative change).

## A Comparison Between Western and Non-Western Cultural Values

<b>American Values</b>	<b>Non-Western Values</b>
nuclear family	extended family
individual is very important	group most important
emphasis on written language	emphasis on legends and stories
upward career mobility	career loyalty and longevity
tasks/goals	relationships
progress and change	community and stability
choice marriages	arranged marriages
democracy	dictatorship
free market economy	strategic business alliances
youth	age and wisdom
directness	indirectness—use of go-betweens
worth through achievements	worth through relationships
competition	equality
separation of religion and government	religion and government often integrated
entertainment is an industry	socializing is entertainment
reasoning in terms of probability	reasoning in terms of known
distrust of authority	submission to authority
private space/ownership	shared space/property
personal problem solving	corporate problem solving
goal orientation and control over future	fate has predetermined the future

***How should I respond to the challenging parts of my culture (such as unpredictability, distrust, etc.)?***

Usually, there is a reason why certain characteristics have developed within a culture. Some of these reasons (causes) are positive, some are negative. If you are experiencing frustration or negative feelings about some things in your home culture, try to identify why those characteristics are there, and if there is anything you can do to help bring about positive change. Always try to focus on the positive aspects (strengths) of your culture and not the negative aspects (weaknesses). Focus on having a positive attitude and influence on those around you, rather than negative or critical attitude.

Xiao-Niao realized that getting angry and always looking at the negative didn't help. She decided that she had to adjust her own attitude, "But anger isn't helpful in the end," she said. "[I should] remain positive in spite of everything. Start changes from myself. Little changes will vibrate and eventually work out big. Sounds like clichés, right? Sometimes simple ideas take a rather long way to get."

## **Faith Challenges**

Studying in another culture not only expands our academic and cultural horizons, but often also expands or challenges our personal and spiritual beliefs and assumptions. Maybe it has exposed us to concepts or questions we have never seriously thought about, such as the three fundamental questions of humanity:

- Where did we come from (our origin)?
- Why are we here (our purpose)?
- Where are we going (our destiny)?

In addition, there are many other questions we may now have about faith and destiny. These important questions, and their answers, determine what we believe about ourselves and how we relate to other people, the world around us, and the choices we make every day. You may find the following suggestions helpful as you explore answers to the deeper questions of life, faith, and destiny that you might have.

### ***Where can I find wisdom and direction for my life?***

Many books claim to be sources of wisdom, or at least to give us wise teaching and insight, and in some cases, this is true. Certainly, many books do offer us excellent and practical insights about life, people, and how the world and relationships work. But some of these sources of “wisdom” actually contradict each other. So where is the true source of wisdom, wisdom that will not fail us and will help us live a life of meaning and ultimate purpose? The Bible tells us that

wisdom ultimately does not come from a book, but from a person. And to gain such wisdom, we must have a personal relationship with that Person.

“Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding. For wisdom is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold. Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. She offers you long life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. Wisdom is a tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly,” Proverbs 3:13-18.

“How much better to get wisdom than gold, and good judgment than silver,” Proverbs 16:16.

“Get the truth and never sell it; also get wisdom, discipline, and good judgment,” Proverbs 23:23.

“Wisdom and money can get you almost anything, but only wisdom can save your life,” Ecclesiastes 7:12.

“If you become wise, you will be the one to benefit. If you scorn wisdom, you will be the one to suffer,” Proverbs 9:12.

“For the LORD grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge and understanding,” Proverbs 2:6.



“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in good judgment,” Proverbs 9:10.

“Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true wisdom. All who obey His commandments will grow in wisdom. Praise Him forever!” Psalm 111:10.

“Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted,” Proverbs 2:12.

“Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the LORD and turn away from evil,” Proverbs 3:7.

You are most influenced by what you choose to believe...through...choices that will facilitate your journey in the path to wisdom.

***How can I experience true success in life?***

The answer to this question varies from person to person. For some, success might be getting wealth and material possessions. For others, success might be getting power or fame. For such people, the ultimate gain for them would be achieving their own happiness. However, a closer look at people who have already obtained wealth, power or fame shows us that they are often not happy. Those who have found themselves at the end of their lives; have often commented that it wasn't fame, power or wealth that made them successful. What made them feel successful was what they did for others and the meaningful relationships they had developed. So, true

success in life is when we have made a difference in other people's lives, not when our goal is to serve ourselves. As you think about what leads to true success in your life, think about what goals you should work toward in order to achieve this success. These may be career goals, personal goals, or relationship goals.

Many words of wisdom about success can be found in the Bible:

"Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success," Proverbs 15:22.

"Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty," Proverbs 21:5.

"Then I observed that most people are motivated to **success** because they envy their neighbors. But this, too, is meaningless—like chasing the wind," Ecclesiastes 4:4.

### ***How can I achieve my goals and objectives in life?***

One strategy that is said to be very effective for achieving goals and objectives is to write them down. Begin by identifying your own personal passion for your life. Define what your personal vision is, what you want to accomplish in your life. Choose goals that are realistic for you. Then identify the action steps you will need to take in order to reach each goal. Next, decide on appropriate deadlines for accomplishing those action steps to reach your goals. The important thing is to take one step at a time, keeping your focus on your goal and moving consistently toward it. And

finally, plan regular times to review your progress and to make any necessary corrections.

***How can I live a life of meaning and purpose?***

Think about what you believe brings true meaning and purpose in life. Have your beliefs and efforts provided true meaning and purpose in your life so far? If so, how can or should you continue to live your life according to those beliefs and actions? If not, what concepts and ideas do you think might provide better answers to your questions and better results for your efforts? Identify how you can explore and test these concepts in your daily life. Evaluate regularly whether your beliefs and assumptions are effectively answering your questions and bringing purpose and meaning to your life. If they aren't, consider what people and resources could help you discover how to experience true meaning and purpose in life. Life is too valuable and too short to leave your destiny simply to chance.

***What is the Bible, and what does it tell us?***

Over the centuries, God has communicated His truths to prophets, kings, and others, who have recorded these revelations for our benefit today. Later, at the perfect time, God spoke His eternal truths to us through Jesus. These were also recorded for our benefit. All of these writings have been put together into one book called the Bible. The questions we may ask are: Can the Author of this truth be trusted? Can His word be trusted? Is there solid evidence that the Bible is reliable? The answer to each of these questions is yes.

### ***Can the Bible be trusted?***

The books of the Bible were written by 40 authors over a span of 1,500 years, yet none of the details and events mentioned in these books has proved to be inconsistent or inaccurate. The Bible is unequalled in its internal consistency and historical accuracy among all the major religious and literary works in human history. Both past and new archaeological findings consistently confirm the reliability of the facts that are presented in the Bible.

Also supporting the integrity and credibility of the Bible are the hundreds of prophecies (events predicted long before their occurrences) that have come to pass exactly as predicted. No other book in history can make this claim. In fact, there are over 2,000 predictions throughout the Bible that have already been fulfilled.

Here are just two examples of fulfilled prophecies:

“But [Jesus] responded, ‘Do you see all these buildings? I tell you the truth, they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!’” Matthew 24:2.

In this passage, Jesus predicted that the beautiful Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed. In A.D. 70, the Roman army captured Jerusalem and completely demolished the Temple.

“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn over what is going to happen to me, but the world will

rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will suddenly turn to wonderful joy,” John 16:20.

In this passage, Jesus predicted His future death and resurrection. He was indeed executed on a cross by Roman soldiers and placed in a tomb, but three days later, He rose from the dead.

### ***Is what the Bible teaches true?***

Some people wonder if the Bible is true. Some believe that parts of the Bible were not translated correctly from the original language or that sections were left out that should have been included. However, examinations by scholars prove that the Bible can be trusted. An objective analysis of the Bible reveals that it contains accurate information about God, humanity, and historical events. Here are four good reasons to trust the Bible.

**The Bible claims to be inspired by God.** God gave His thoughts to men who used their own writing styles to communicate those thoughts. Peter wrote about this in the Bible: “...Those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God,” 2 Peter 1:21.

Paul, another follower of Jesus, also talked about this: “All Scripture is inspired by God [literally “God-breathed”] and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right,” 2 Timothy 3:16.

**Jesus said the Bible is true and was given by God.**

Even Jesus, who claimed to be God, said that the Bible is true (see Matthew 22:29; John 17:17) and historically accurate (Matthew 12:40; 24:37-38), that it cannot be altered (John 10:35), and that the predictions in it must happen (Matthew 5:17-18).

Jesus also confirmed the truthfulness of the Bible when He quoted from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy (8:3) in Matthew 4:4, describing the Bible as the “word that comes from the mouth of God.” He also said that the creation described in Genesis 2 was spoken by God (Matthew 19:4-5; Genesis 2:24).

**Other Bible writers, including those who knew Jesus, said the Bible is true and inspired by God.**

Paul, who wrote almost half of the books in the New Testament said that his own words were given by the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit also guided other people in their writings (1 Corinthians 2:13; Ephesians 3:4-5). And Peter referred to Paul’s books as “Scriptures,” 2 Peter 3:15-16.

John, one of Jesus’ disciples, was present at Jesus’ execution. When John describes Jesus’ death in the Bible, he says, “This report is from an eyewitness giving an accurate account. He speaks the truth so that you also can believe,” John 19:35. Luke, a physician, scholar, and contemporary of Jesus, wrote this in the Bible:

“Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used

the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you...so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught,"  
Luke 1:1-4.

**Many who lived during Jesus' time died for their belief in the Bible.** According to early Christian documents, writers of the Bible's New Testament like Matthew, Luke, Paul, James, and Peter died as martyrs because of their faith in Jesus and their belief in God's message, which they wrote about in the Bible.

**Other evidence for the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible:**

1. Although it was written over a period of 1,500 years by 40 different authors, there is complete unity and consistency across the different writings that make up the Bible.
2. More than 5,000 ancient copies exist of the original New Testament which helps to confirm that today's Bible is accurate.
3. There are more than 24,970 ancient documents that confirm the accuracy and content of the New Testament writings, far more than any other book of antiquity.
4. Numerous archaeological discoveries have confirmed the accuracy of the New and Old Testament documents.
5. The Bible has accurately predicted specific events many years, sometimes centuries, before they actually occurred. Approximately 2,500 prophecies appear in the pages of the Bible about

2,000 of which have already been fulfilled exactly as predicted. The remaining 500 or so have not yet been fulfilled because they are still to happen in the future.

***What does the Bible say about the Big Questions in life? Where did we come from? (What is my origin?)***

The Bible tells us that the God who created the universe also created us. According to the story of the Bible, we did not just appear, or evolve, from random mass. The unanswered question to the theory of evolution is, where did the first mass and the design for life come from? It is impossible for something to come from nothing, unless there is a creative force and designer behind it. In fact, the Bible tells us that God created everything that has been created, according to His design and purpose. For the human race, and each of us personally, this is a much better option than to say there is no creator God, and that, therefore, our lives do not have ultimate meaning or purpose. Here are some passages from the Bible that explain where the universe, the world, and we came from:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1.

“So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them,” Genesis 1:27.

“For the LORD is God, and He created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. He made the world



to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos. 'I am the LORD,' He says, 'and there is no other,'" Isaiah 45:18.

"For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God," Romans 1:20.

"But I did find this: God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path," Ecclesiastes 7:29.

***Why are we here? (What is my purpose in life?)***

Everyone everywhere is looking for meaning and purpose in life. A man in China longs to know that his life matters just like an African student who is studying at an American university. No doubt you also want to make a difference in the world and find lasting satisfaction and purpose. Some people believe they will find purpose and satisfaction by becoming part of a group that will help them achieve their goals. Others feel that obtaining power, wealth, honor, or popularity will help them find fulfillment. Unfortunately, while many of our goals may be honorable, we can still feel empty and wonder, "Isn't there more to life?" even after we have achieved all that we thought would make us happy.

Jesus knew that achieving our goals is no guarantee for ultimate fulfillment; He asked in Luke 9:25, "What

do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?"

Finding purpose and meaning apart from God is impossible. Why? Because He created us. Just like an engineer designs a boat for the water or a car for the road, God designed us to fulfill the purpose for which He made us.

Have you ever wondered what His purpose is for your life? A passage in the Bible identifies two primary purposes for our lives—"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself," Matthew 22:37, 39.

In this passage, God reveals that our greatest purpose is found in knowing and loving Him and in caring for others.

Paul, one of the first followers of Jesus, described this kind of love that comes from God in his writings:

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love," 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, 13.

When we live a life of love for God and others, we please God and our love demonstrates His character to others. But, as you're probably thinking, we have a problem. We're often self-centered, and at those times, we don't love God and others as we've been designed to do.

Does that mean we have to live life without satisfaction and meaning? Not at all. God provided a way for us to become more and more like Him and to love the way He loves—through a transforming relationship with his Son, Jesus.

***Where are we going? (What is my final destiny - what happens to me when I die)?***

The Bible explains that God created not only our human, biological body, but also our spirit that lives inside our body. In other words, of all created beings, only humans are able to interact with both the material (biological) world and the spirit world (because we are both material and spiritual). It also says that we were created for a personal relationship with God, but that relationship has been broken by sin (our separation/rebellion against God). When our biological body gets sick or old and dies, it deteriorates and ceases to exist, but our true self — the spirit inside our bodies—continues to live. In fact, our spirit will live forever. The Bible explains that those who have chosen God's way in this life will continue to live with Him for all eternity, but those who have chosen their own way will live separated from God for all eternity. Here are some passages that talk about this:

“But the LORD God warned him [Adam, the first man], ‘You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die,’”  
Genesis 2:16-17.

“They [people] refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God’s justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too.”  
Romans 1:31-32

“But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners [rebellious against God],” Romans 5:8.

“And Christ lives within you, so even though your body will die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you have been made right with God,”  
Romans 8:10.

“It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies,” 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

“And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for Him,” Hebrews 9:27-28.

***Why is there so much pain, suffering, and evil in the world? What is the solution?***

Have you ever watched television and been discouraged by world tragedies? Or have you read the newspaper and wondered why bad things happen to good people? When disaster strikes our personal lives, the lives of those we love, or even people who live in other countries, it's normal to ask why. Unfortunately, there isn't an easy answer for tragedy. Only God, whose ways and thoughts are higher than ours, can explain some things that are often a mystery to us (see Isaiah 55:9). Thankfully, even though we don't always know why bad things happen in the world, the Bible does give us some reasons for personal and global suffering.

Suffering can be the result of sin. The Bible tells us that God has given humans the choice to follow His ways and love Him. However, just as we cannot force others to love us, God doesn't force those He's created to love and follow Him. When Adam and Eve (the first man and woman God created—according to the Bible record) chose not to obey God's instructions, there were not only consequences for them, but for the entire human race born after them. Ever since the

disobedience of Adam and Eve, the world has been broken by sin.

Certainly the world is still wonderful in many ways, but because we live in a broken world, natural disasters, disease, drought, decay, and physical death trouble everyone. As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, the human race has been poisoned by selfishness, greed, fear, hatred, cruelty, and deceit, which results in rape, murder, war, and other evils.

The second reason people suffer is because of their own sin. For example, a man who robs a bank may become crippled when he is shot by the police. Or a child may get hit by a car after disobeying his or her parents and running into the street.

A third reason for suffering is that people sin against each other. For example, millions of people have been killed because of hatred between certain groups or because of selfish or racist leaders.

Not all suffering is a result of sin. Sometimes we suffer because our actions or decisions, though not the result of sin, are the result of ignorance or carelessness. For example, a woman may forget to turn off her stove, resulting in her apartment building burning down.

Finally, people can even suffer because of the good choices they make. When a man donates his kidney to his sick brother, he will experience pain. Or if a woman chooses to give away her wealth to serve the poor, she may experience financial difficulty. This kind of suffering can result from the very highest kind

of love. Jesus said, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends," John 15:13. This is the kind of love that Jesus has for you.

For answers to the issue of suffering, see "7 Universal Truths" found at [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org).

***Is there a God? And if so, how can I know this God?***

Like many people, maybe you've wondered if God exists. Some people think you can't prove that He exists and you can't prove that He doesn't. However, even if we can't prove that God exists the way we can prove that the sun shines, it doesn't mean there isn't strong evidence for His existence. As you search for positive answers that God is real, consider the following:

**Living things are evidence that God exists.** It would be illogical to say that anything that exists did not have a cause or a creator. For example, the Seven Wonders of the World, such as the Great Wall of China and the Taj Mahal in India, are so amazing that no one would deny that someone built them with a plan. In an even greater way, it would be illogical to say that the planets, stars, trees, mountains, oceans, and all of creation happened by accident, without cause, without a plan, or without a designer. For this reason, some people say it takes more faith to believe God doesn't exist than to believe He does. There is certainly a designer behind the design of all living things.

In recent years, mathematicians and other scientists have calculated the mathematical probability that life

came about by random chance. According to their calculations the chances of this happening are essentially zero. For this reason, the Bible tells us, “The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship,” Psalm 19:1. The Bible also says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” Genesis 1:1. And still another passage in the Bible says, “...I am the Lord, who made all things. I alone stretched out the heavens. Who was with me when I made the earth?” Isaiah 44:24.

**The human longing for significance and personal fulfillment is evidence for God’s existence.**

No matter where you travel in the world, everyone everywhere desires emotional and spiritual satisfaction (what many people call “happiness”). Why? Because every person, whether young or old, has a “place” inside him or her that is unable to find complete satisfaction, no matter what he or she achieves or owns. Some people call this our “God vacuum”—an internal place designed by God that can only be filled with God. Could it be that God has created humans to know Him? And could it be that one of the ways He helps us to seek a relationship with Him is by giving us the capacity to feel that dissatisfaction deep inside of us?

**The human desire to worship is evidence of God’s existence.** Every world religion exists because people feel a need or desire to worship something. In fact, even if a man lived alone on a deserted island, he would want to worship something, such as a power higher than himself. The Bible tells us this is because God created human beings with the capacity to



worship Him. In fact, the Bible tells us that we should love God and serve and worship Him alone (Matthew 4:10). (The Bible also clearly tells us that God created us with an innate need for Him and that even His creation reveals His existence and invisible qualities. See Romans 1:18-23 and Psalm 139.) But the Bible also tells us that our independence from God, our rebellion against Him, or our distrust of Him have led us to worship things other than God.

**Human conscience is evidence that God exists.**

Have you ever wondered why people everywhere believe there are right and wrong ways to live? For example, why do most people believe that selfishness and murder are bad? The Bible teaches that God has created us with an inner “conscience” that helps us recognize right from wrong and that it is God who has placed these standards for life in our hearts and minds.

The Bible explains that we are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27)—that we are like Him in specific ways. One way we are like Him is in this capacity to know what is right and wrong. As a result, we experience a sense of guilt when we do something wrong.

These are just some of the evidences for the existence of God. For additional help, you can read the Bible to learn more about what God says about Himself and His ways.

For more information about who God is and getting to know Him, see the following resources:

- <http://www.focus.org.uk/>
- Seven Universal Truths – [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org)
- Life's Deepest Question – [www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org)

### ***Who is Jesus Christ, and what did He do?***

If you've heard about Jesus, maybe you've wondered about His identity. Perhaps you've heard that He was a great teacher or prophet, or that He is a legend, or maybe that He claimed to be God. Jesus actually did claim to be God. Therefore, if He were only a good teacher or prophet, then He lied about His identity, which would mean He was a liar, or perhaps a madman. If this were the case, He certainly shouldn't be called good. Some might say, "Well, then He must be a legend, a story that was made up." This also cannot be true because it takes time for legends to develop, and many of the people who witnessed Jesus' life firsthand and wrote about it would not have had the time to develop fictional stories about Him. Further, they wouldn't have given their lives as many of them did for something they knew was a lie.

The Bible tells us that we were created for a purpose, for a relationship with the God of the universe. However, we chose to rebel against God and go our own, independent way. This brought death to our relationships with God, with other people, and with the world.

We needed a way to get back to God and the life we were created to have. Jesus, God's perfect Son, chose

to come to earth to be the perfect sacrifice who would die for our sin. He made the way for us to get back to God. In fact, the Bible clearly tells us that He is the only acceptable way back to God (John 14:6). According to the Bible, Jesus is God. In fact, He accepted worship (John 9:35-38; 20:28-29), claimed He had the authority to forgive sin (Matthew 9:1-7), healed people of diseases (e.g., Mark 1:30-31), and cast out demons (e.g., Mark 1:32-34). Most importantly, He rose from the dead to prove that He is the Creator of all life (Matthew 27:53; Mark 8:31; 16:9). He also said that the Old Testament was written about Him and that He is the one who gives eternal life to people (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39-40).

You might be asking, "Since Jesus is God, what does this mean for me?"

Are you spiritually hungry or thirsty? Jesus said that He is the Bread of Life. He said, "...Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty," John 6:35.

Do you need direction in your life? Or have you felt that you are walking in spiritual darkness? Jesus said, "...I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life," John 8:12.

Do you hope to go to heaven? Jesus said that He is the way to get there. He said, "Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved..." John 10:9. Jesus said that He came as the Messiah, or Savior, "...to give His life as a ransom for many," Mark 10:45.

This means that Jesus came to save you from your sins. He predicted that He would suffer and die and sacrifice His life for humankind and that God would raise Him from the dead after three days so that you could have eternal life. And that is exactly what He did.

***Isn't Christianity just a western religion (created by westerners, for westerners)?***

Contrary to what many people think, Christianity was not a Western invention. Christianity is a faith system based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, who was born a Jew, and the select writings of God-worshippers over many centuries.

Christianity started as a movement in Jerusalem, then spread to the surrounding areas of Samaria and Judea, and ultimately over two millennia, throughout the entire world.

Christianity was initially rejected by many in the East as well as the West, but through sacrificial missionary efforts has eventually become known and accepted by millions of people around the world.

There are numerous competing religious systems throughout the world, each trying to answer the fundamental questions of humanity:

- Where did we come from? (origin),
- Why are we here? (purpose), and
- Where are we going? (destiny).

In addition, most try to provide answers or solutions to the problems of pain, suffering, and evil in the world. Christianity claims that God, not a religious system, has provided the answers and solutions to these questions and problems, through what His son Jesus Christ said and did while He lived on earth, as well as through the writings of the Christian holy book (the Bible).

***How/where can I continue to learn about God and faith?***

You can continue to learn about God and faith by reading the Bible. This will be your most important source of information about life, its purpose, and eternity that is true and trustworthy. You can also supplement your reading with books or materials by other Christian authors. Internet sources can give you a great deal of information. Some sites that can be trusted include:

[www.isireturnees.org](http://www.isireturnees.org)  
[www.internationalstudents.org](http://www.internationalstudents.org)  
[www.allaboutGod.com](http://www.allaboutGod.com)  
[www.ChinaSource.org](http://www.ChinaSource.org)  
<http://bible.org/>

You can also continue to learn about God and faith with others. Find other Christians either at a church or house fellowship where a group of Christians might meet regularly for Bible study, prayer and encouragement.



## **In Conclusion**

As a returnee, remember that you've had a once-in-a-lifetime experience to be able to study outside of your country. Your thoughts and beliefs have been challenged and opened to new possibilities. As you return to your country, keep your mind open and understand that your expectations may limit you. Therefore, look for the positive and with humility consider how you may take what you have learned to help others in your home country.

We asked some returnees who are now in their home countries what advice they would give to international students to prepare them for their trip home. Here are some suggestions they had to share:

"I would say they themselves may have a reconsidering after have some time in United States considering the purpose of life. My hope is that they would re-evaluate their values and faith..." ~An Xin

"[They should] lower their expectations! Yes, about home, others, about services... Everyone has this adapting time. First [we are] excited, very excited, but when we find something is different, then we are depressed, frustrated, but then we adapt." ~Bao Yu

"For people coming back to Taiwan, [they] need to be prepared about the marriage pressure. Be prepared that parents might put pressure on you. ...Be diplomatic about it." ~Ching Lan

“Keeping a good relationship with family members while still studying in U.S. is important [and] may prevent the adjustment problems. Students need to let their family know about their concerns about returning home, sharing personal space so that the family knows how to help them. If not financially able to live on own, talk with family about their need, ask for more personal space at home while spending quality time with family.” ~Jia-li

“Have two different mindsets. When in Taiwan, try to have a Taiwanese mindset. When in the US, have a US mindset. Otherwise, it’s too hard.” ~Fang

“Cherish what you have experienced and received from living in America.” ~Lu Chu

“You will [experience] reverse culture shock, and you have to readjust. ... Years ago people thought, ‘Oh, you studied in the US, you are elite.’ But now most people don’t think that. Maybe you will stay at home; you will [be] unemployed. So there are many challenges we may face. I think try to bring something good from the US, and do something for our country. ... But be prepared, not so optimistic, because there are many, many difficulties.” ~Cong

“After you learn in the States, you should love your home town more. And use your knowledge to make your home town better, also to learn as much as possible [while] in the states.” ~Zhang Yimou



“Take the skills you learned in the American classroom and use them in your home country.”  
~Lin-Lin

“Let them know that re-entry has its culture shock! They have changed too! Culture back home has changed. Slowly build your friendships. Don’t push your experience. Don’t try to make comparisons.”  
~Lan

“Try to find some local connection with those who have returned earlier [and] have overseas experience. Ask them for suggestions, and also lower down your expectations. Usually when people decide to return home, they have high expectations for their future life and career. [Know that you] will face many difficulties.” ~Wang

“Avoid arrogance. Returnees need to adjust their mindset when they return to fit into their culture. They should not be puffed up about their overseas experience, but humbly and prayerfully seek how they can better serve their culture.” ~Dong

“Be yourself; try to maintain a positive attitude. Open your heart and do not be quick to judge your homeland or the Chinese people. Have an open mind.”  
~Xun

“Make sure that you know what you really want is critical to make right decisions for you. If you just want to leverage the international experiences of studying abroad to get you a competitive edge in a global economy, think globally and act locally in

China. If you want to leverage your international experiences to explore more of the world, then do try your best to experience the U.S. life and culture, and involve as much as you can. Make certain preparations for your next-stop destination when you come back. Cherish the quality time with your family and friends, because for better or worse, they are always behind you and your home is where your heart is." ~Hui-ying

## **Resources On Marriage**

*The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by  
John M. Gottman, PhD

*The Couple's Survival Workbook: What you can Do To  
Reconnect With Your Partner and Make Your Marriage  
Work* by David Olsen and Douglas Stephens

Ambassador for Christ resources:

<http://www.afcresources.org/bookstore/contents/en-us/d27.html>

<http://2becoming1.com/aboutus> *Two Becoming One*  
material by Don and Sally Meredith available in  
Chinese script. Call to get the Chinese version.