



## MADE IN CHINA

Did you know that 80 percent of the world's air conditioners and 70 percent of our mobile phones are made in China? Imagine if something similar would happen in our efforts to fulfill Christ's Great Commission.

If additional millions of Chinese became Christians and were sent throughout the world, China would become the largest missionary sending country in history. Many new believers around the world could then say they were "made in China" because these Chinese missionaries brought the gospel to them! Today, right here in the United States, you can help build this missionary force by discipling Chinese students on your campus. Consider the following examples:

"Yuan" was discipled by an American pastor while he studied at Columbia University. After graduation, he returned to China not only with a master's degree but with a greater vision for his life. Yuan decided to follow God's call to a rural village where hundreds of lepers, abandoned by their families, live in isolation from society. He started a ministry to care for these lepers both physically and spiritually, and many of their lives have been transformed by the love of Christ. This ministry has presented a powerful testimony to the Chinese community.

"Ting" came to the U.S. to pursue her graduate degree at Ohio State University. Her vision for God's Kingdom grew steadily as she participated in an international student ministry on that campus. Upon graduation, she decided to

follow God's call to Central Asia, reaching out to Muslims by providing medical and educational support.

Like Yuan and Ting, more and more Chinese believers are starting to take the gospel to areas of the world where American Christians cannot go. As we reach Chinese students today, we are truly reaching the world tomorrow. But in order to maximize our impact through Chinese disciples, we must develop our understanding of the opportunities and barriers presented by their culture.

## Understanding Their World

### Cultural Considerations

Culture can play a major role in affecting the spiritual faithfulness of our disciples. Consider these challenges to the walk and witness of Chinese students:

- Chen's father was furious to know his son had become a Christian. "Don't you know the embarrassment I will face at work?" he yelled. "I didn't send you to school for becoming religious and excuse yourself from studying. You are a failure." How would you respond to Chen when he tells you he can't attend your Bible study?
- Every time Xin and her mom have a conversation, the topic always ends up on marriage. "Don't be too picky," Xin's mother will typically say. "Find someone to marry soon!" How would you respond if Xin tells you she really

needs to get married, no matter if her prospective husband is a Christian or not?

- Tang, a new believer, tells you, “I know what you mean by trusting God, but it just won’t work in China. It’s not realistic to share my faith with my family and friends.” How would you help Tang with her view of evangelism?
- Iris, a recent returnee, said, “It’s so hard to be a Christian back home. I’m expected to work 50-90 hours a week. I have no energy for church.” How could you help a returnee like Iris?

Perhaps you already know chapter-and-verse that you would want to share with the students in those specific situations—and that’s fantastic. However, we all must consider broader cultural themes that influence students’ thinking. Otherwise, we may win a few discipleship battles but lose the war. Here are some fundamental aspects of Chinese culture that clash with biblical values.

#### **Atheistic Worldview**

Even though some Chinese students may have been raised within Buddhism, most have been surrounded by an atheistic worldview. Even a young Christian may still be ensnared by a focus on temporal pleasures and achievements. The idea of surrendering to the Lordship of Christ may seem foreign.

#### **Filial Piety**

In a filial piety culture, an important way to show love and honor to one’s parents is to follow the parents’ guidance even when there is an important disagreement. So if a student has to say “no” to his or her parents because of a Christian value, this may seem like a betrayal of the family. Conflicts can often arise when a student chooses to regularly attend church, decides to decline a potential marriage to a non-believer, or pursues a calling to vocational ministry.

#### **Honor and Shame**

In an honor and shame culture, the focus is not on what is right or wrong but what will bring honor or dishonor to an individual or that person’s family. In the Chinese culture, this is called “face”/“mianzi.” For example, a student may not feel much guilt in cheating on a test because a good score will provide face/mianzi. Obviously, this cultural emphasis is in conflict with the Bible’s teaching on truth and righteousness.

### **Challenges at Home**

In addition to the culture values that could be barriers for Chinese students to follow Christ, there are a few more challenges that many Chinese Christian students face when they go home:

- Parental objection to their faith and what their faith requires of them

- Parental and societal pressure for them to get married to non-Christians
- Lack of opportunities to know other Chinese Christians
- Potential hostile environment towards Christians, even persecution
- Limited time for fellowship with other Christians due to demanding work schedules and social expectations

### **Entering into Their World**

In light of the realities that Chinese believers may face, here are a few tips to consider as you help build into their lives.

#### **Saving Face**

Although we should never compromise a Christian value for the sake of face, we also should not thoughtlessly violate this cultural norm. For example, when leading a small group, do not call out an individual for an incorrect answer as this may result in unnecessary embarrassment and damage to relationships. Rather, you will want to speak to the individual privately.

#### **Helping Them Honor Their Parents**

Help believers to see that honoring God doesn’t necessarily mean dishonoring their parents. When someone chooses to obey God, he/she will be motivated to love parents in some new and thrilling ways—and ultimately help those parents to experience God’s love.

#### **Modeling Vulnerability**

Demonstrate your own willingness to be vulnerable and to confess sin to others. Because of the shame and honor paradigm, Chinese believers may tend to hesitate in sharing their weaknesses and struggles.

#### **Meeting in Groups**

Discipleship through small group discovery is a preferred way. Small groups allow the Chinese students to learn to build meaningful relationships with same-sex peers and to find accountability among those peers.





### Spending Quality Time Together

It takes time to build deep relationships with Chinese students. Spending quality time together (shopping, cooking, hiking, etc) outside of Christian activities is key to develop a stronger relationship that God can use for mutual growth.

## Nurturing Them as Believers Within Their Culture

### Help Them Practice Contextualized Faith

There is a Chinese saying that says, “One more Christian is one less Chinese.” This is a painful expression of the commonly-held belief that one can either be Chinese or a Christian but not both. Lacking examples of how to be both Chinese and Christian, many Chinese students who meet the Lord in an English-speaking environment struggle to connect their faith to their culture. Because it is vital for them to practice their faith within their heart language, the following tips are important for their long-term spiritual health.

- Give away bilingual Bibles. Take turns reading together in English and Chinese.
- Challenge them to pray in their mother tongue (Mandarin, Cantonese, etc.) with you or help them find a prayer partner who speaks the same language.
- Encourage your disciples to attend a Chinese church where they can worship with other Chinese Christians and learn to serve under Chinese leadership and church government.
- Urge Chinese Christians to listen to worship songs and sermons in their language. (See resources following.)
- Remind them to celebrate the aspects of their culture that reflect the beauty of God and his creation, as well as mourn over aspects stemming from humanity’s sinful nature.
- Help your disciple to understand their identity in the Lord

and the ways in which the Lord might use them as his servants within their culture.

- Help each believer to develop their own personal story so they can share what God has done in their lives with family and friends.

## Key Topics to Address

### Baptism

Chinese believers may think of baptism as an official way to “join the club.” Help them understand the meaning of baptism as an identification with Christ, and help them to welcome this opportunity to honor the Lord—not just a submission to church-based pressure.

### Purity and Cohabitation

“Living together” is a common practice for Chinese students today. Consider going through the Moral Issues Studies to help them form godly attitudes and practices ([bridgeschinesenetwork.com/moral-issues/](http://bridgeschinesenetwork.com/moral-issues/)): to discuss cohabitation, premarital sex, pornography, and online relationships.

### Marriage

Many students experience pressure from their families to get married soon, yet they have no models for biblical marriage. Thus, they may not realize the importance of trusting God for his timing in marriage and his selection of a godly mate. Family Life ([jiatingshenghuo.com](http://jiatingshenghuo.com)) has a Chinese website that offers articles and resources on this topic.

### Relating to Parents

You will probably want to recommend that your disciples read Peter Liu’s Honor Parents Biblically. It offers practical suggestions to Chinese Christians on how to follow God’s command to honor their parents. It can be purchased on TienDao bookstore ([ustiendao.net](http://ustiendao.net)).

### Emotional Health

Many of today’s Chinese students struggle with mental and emotional health issues. Xinshengming ([xinshengming.com](http://xinshengming.com)) offers articles that pertain to such relevant topics as eating disorders, drug addiction and abortion.

### Evangelism

Sharing their faith with others may be one of the biggest challenges for Chinese students. Beizeng gives some creative methods such as “Pray-Copy-Paste” ([beizeng.xinshengming.com/start/WeChatLinks.html](http://beizeng.xinshengming.com/start/WeChatLinks.html)) and includes a list of Chinese articles for Christian students to share with their Chinese friends via social media or text messages.

### Time

Academic pressures and other commitments on campus might affect students’ availability to meet for regular

discipleship. At times, you may want to invite them to join you for dinner as a way to catch up.

### **Security and Social Media**

Help your disciples understand the risks of sharing their faith or making political statements on social media. Also, when you share a Chinese friend's story, make sure to protect his or her identity (make sure to alter their name, obscure their face, etc.)

## **Helping Them Prepare to Return Home**

Students who meet the Lord in America are not always thinking about the challenges of returning to their home countries. Yet those challenges are very real. In fact, current statistics indicate that only 20% of Christian returnees will walk with Jesus after they get back to China. So how can we prepare them for the challenges they will encounter when they return? How can we prepare them to walk with Jesus for a lifetime?

You will certainly want to employ the specific suggestions given in bullet points below. But before studying that list, please note the all-embracing need to teach the full gospel to your disciples. As John Lu says, they must understand the biblical cost of following Jesus. It is important, according to Reverend Lu, to "help them embrace a theology of suffering and patience. This theology will help them to not immediately run away from problems in life but to faithfully depend on God to preserve them through difficult times." With that in mind, here are some practical tips to prepare your students for the spiritual challenges they will face after returning to China:

- **Pray with and for your student often.** Show them in the Word where Jesus talks about persecution and His promise to "take heart."
- **Share the reality.** It's important that you inform your disciples about the challenges they might face as well as how they can return successfully.
- **Register students on "SendingPad.com."** The form needs to be filled out by their staff member or mentor. Trusted Christians will then connect your students to fellowship after they return to China.
- **Help them develop servants' hearts.** Give your disciples opportunities to serve while in the U.S. (working in a church nursery, helping at a homeless shelter, etc.) instead of only being served by others. They will not be pampered upon their return to China.
- **Keep in touch.** Before your friends return home, teach them about the need to communicate securely. After they return, continue to pursue and connect with them at least

in the first year. Perhaps you will be the only believer in a newly-returned Christian's life.

## **Final Words**

Though "Yuan" and "Ting" each have vibrant walks with Jesus today, it was not always this way. Soon after Ting became a Christian, she had doubts that God loved her unconditionally. Yuan wanted to read the Bible but sometimes allowed academic pressures to consume all his time. Neither knew how to tell their family members about their faith.

But God used mentors to speak grace and truth into the lives of Yuan and Ting. And as they began to grow in their faith, each was used by God to influence others. Ting began to regularly invite her classmates to Bible studies. Yuan boldly shared his faith with his parents. Both began to help build spiritual movements on their campuses.

You can help play an important part in the spiritual growth of your Chinese friends. What a wonderful privilege you have to spiritually invest in their lives. The process may not be easy, but the results will be both fulfilling and strategic. Together with your Chinese friends, you can help change the world and produce many "Made in China" breakthroughs.

## **Resources**

- Print Bibles for Chinese and bilingual Bible (order at AFC bookstore [afcreources.org](http://afcreources.org)). The CUV (Chinese Union Version) is commonly accepted in the Chinese church, while the CNV (Chinese New Version) and CSB (Chinese Standard Version) are popular with students.
- Bible App: WeDevote ([app.wedevote.com](http://app.wedevote.com)) website offers special features such as text search, reading plans and multiple versions (Chinese and bilingual).
- Bridges Chinese Network ([bridgeschinesenetwork.com/resources/to-equip/](http://bridgeschinesenetwork.com/resources/to-equip/)) has multiple bilingual Bible studies that can be used with students who have recently placed their faith in Christ. For example, *Developing Your New Relationship with God*.
- Ilovegrow ([ilovegrow.com](http://ilovegrow.com)) This Chinese language website offers topics which range from knowing God to dealing with personal struggles to understanding cult errors.
- The Gospel Coalition ([tgcchinese.org](http://tgcchinese.org)) Chinese edition. Their website provides various gospel-centered resources to encourage and educate Christians around the world.