Preparing for Your Reentry Transition
Lessons from Asian Returnees
Resource List:

Article

Books

Game
Chinn, Lisa Espineli. Custom & Culture (a role play and re-entry simulation game). Madison, WI: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. Can be purchased at <www.intervarsity.org/store/ism/>

Video

Conference
INK (Internationals for God’s Kingdom): a conference focused on preparing international students for post-academic transition. Contact InterVarsity for information.

Christian Network
ACMI Link: www.acmi-net.net/acmi-link
International Fellowship of Evangelical Students: www.ifesworld.org
Japanese Christian Fellowship Network: www.jcfn.org

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SECTION 2: REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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SECTION 3: RESOURCE LIST

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Section 3
Resource List
3. What do you need to focus on as you prepare for your reentry?

4. What kind of help do you need before you leave?

In this section, we gathered comments from returnees who have gone home to various Asian countries about their experience and advice. They are based on (1) a survey of returned Christian international students by Leiton E. Chinn in 1988 (used with permission) and (2) a survey of returned Christian and non-Christian students by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship from 2007 to 2008. Most of the comments by returnees have not been edited to standard English to maintain the voice and character of the students.
What returnees say about their reentry experience:

Much different from the U.S. in many small ways
Large changes had happened
Seeing air and water pollution, I felt uncomfortable
After enjoying the moderate climate in the city I lived in in the U.S., I was not used to the heat in my hometown
More cars and more dogs
More people and more hurry in everything
A lot of change happened on family members and me
China is in progress and my colleagues are richer than before
Family members, relatives and friends who know nothing about Christianity
Facing the reality that some of them may not be happy with you
People back home think of you as half-American
Difficulty for my child to continue her Chinese course
In China Christianity has been called a foreign religion
Prejudice and invincible persecution for the community government
My government doesn’t allow returning Christians to say Christ to my people

1. What is the most helpful information you received from this booklet?

2. Which advice is most appropriate in your situation? Why?
What advice returnees give:

China is developing fast. There are more than 5 millions graduated from colleges in China every year.

In these years more people are returning to China from other countries so the working opportunity is decreasing so do not aim too high.

Psychological treatment: say to yourself “it takes time to have change and improve” and concentrate on what you need to do.

Be flexible and remember you are away from the U.S.

Face the reality

Don’t use American ways to solve Chinese problems

Apply what you have learned in the U.S. practically and realistically

Get the latest news from your own country

Do some telephone survey to your friends and relatives are useful to get the updated situation of your country

Study the Bible thoroughly before returning

Be aware of the harsh reality of potential persecution and discrimination

Be prepared for the ‘very’ fundamentalist background of the Chinese house church in its negative sense

Know how to be politically sensitive as to how far you can go in your Christian witness

Know something about Chinese church history

Be aware of some issues dealing with mission and culture
What returnees say about their reentry experience:

**GENERAL**
- Too high hopes and expectations
- Culture shock
- Family’s expectations

**FAMILY**
- Hierarchy among society and family members
- Authority of parents
- Parents may not accept their son or daughter’s becoming a Christian
- Non-Christian family
- Difficulties in accepting relatives and friends
- Family and community pressure to conform

**SOCIAL**
- Changes at home and in the returnee’s point of view
- Feel out of place or ill at ease
- Unfamiliarity with new forms of communication or style of expression
- Generation gap: lose touch with cultural trends while abroad
- Unable to identify with the local problems and contemporary issues
- Adjustments to changes in lifestyle
- Dissatisfaction with some ritualized patterns of social interaction
- Frustration as a result of conflicting attitudes
- Bring too much head knowledge
- Possibility of being discriminated, we’re different now

**INDIA**
- Being asked various questions about doctrines to see if the returnee has changed his/her views or not

**LAOS**
- Difficulties in sharing my faith with colleagues

**MYANMAR**
- Different way of living
- Different way of communicating, especially with elders
What returnees say about their reentry experience:

Communication problem (I still adopt verbal and non-verbal codes from the U.S.)
The thought of going back to the U.S. since some people may think that U.S. is better than their country
My lifestyle has changed. I like to be on time. But Thai people are easy going people
I expect those who are around me to be more disciplined. But they expect me to do many things. Thai people always want something new. They cannot do anything for a long period of time

What advice returnees give:

Do not expect family and friends back home to do what you want to do
You are not the same but others are still the same in their lifestyle
Try to be a good observer and gradually readjust to the situation there
Some things have changed so much; for example, roads, bus, buildings, laws. You should ask friends and relatives for information
Do not be frustrated. Smile always
Have friends in the U.S. pray for you

JOB

Limited job choices
Competition with local graduates
Job hunting will be very frustrating especially without good Christian friends

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Being in a predominantly Buddhist culture
Being new: how to start serving in a church
Difficulty in being involved in a church
Difference in church setting and para-church ministry from what they have experienced while away
Tendency to impose North American church practices and models on their home church, thus creating conflicts and rejection
More diverse group of people in fellowship or worship service
May find the Christians back home less friendly
What advice returnees give:

GENERAL
- Constantly review your motive/vision of returning home
- Be open-minded and tolerant to differences and changes

FAMILY
- Prepare to live with non-Christian parents with great obedience and respect and appropriate confrontation when necessary

SOCIAL
- Know more about home country. Get news from friends and family
- Make effort to be involved in activities with friends, colleagues, and church friends.
- Be a good, normal servant of your church and community

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
- Pray for your return
- Pray and think about why you want to go back and what you can do to best serve the Lord.
- Keep close to God. He is the only one who can help you in every problem you face
- Set your focus on Jesus.
- Love your home church first. Cooperate second and change things last.
- Be lowly in heart and submit to church leaders
- Be patient and humble and rely on God
- Have fellowship with other returnees
- Allow yourself some time to fit in, especially for fresh grads who no longer belong to college fellowships yet still not comfortable with those of the working adult

What returnees say about their reentry experience:

- Weather is humid
- Traffic is busy
- It’s very crowded. There are many people everywhere
- Air quality is not good
- Everyone speaks language that I used before, not English any more
- I worry my English will regress
- No Christian friends
- Adjustment to family members who are not Christian
- People and media only care about money

What advice returnees give:

- Adjust your expectations and attitudes and life will be fun
- Pray for God’s guidance
What advice returnees give:

Be prepared for a new life
When I was returning, I thought I won’t have any trouble to adjust. Yes, everything was almost the same compared to before I left my country, but I was changed a lot. That made me really confused. If, you keep in mind that you’ll meet totally new life like you were in the U.S. for the first time, you can overcome those kinds of difficulties
Just try to adjust to the new environment without seriously thinking about the differences. You will find yourself adjusting after a certain period of time
When you are in Korea, then you have to forget the life in the U.S. As the proverb says, “When in Rome, do as Roman do.”
Do not expect that you can share all your experience and memory with your family and friends.
Meet new people or learning new things
Keep your mind open
Keep in mind that God is always with you regardless of where you are

What returnees say about their reentry experience:

Facing differences and changing cultures again
Adjustment to a different lifestyle
Normal frustration on how things are just different, for instance horrible public transportation in Indonesia that made traveling for the car-less largely uncomfortable
Hot, humid weather
Slow internet that interrupted the internet-dependant life rhythm
So many beggars on the street that you’ve had to question why so many people have grown indifferent and a sense of apathy towards the poor and needy
Changes in bureaucratic leadership
Temporary insecurity for having a low salary
Adjustment to a way of thinking “making something without much working”
Temptations to criticize
Having become more ‘Americanized’
Returned as a changed person (became a devout Christian in the U.S.)
Meeting the high standards and expectations people have of students educated abroad
Facing a different religious atmosphere
Absence of real fellowship at church
No church to be a part of (became a Christian)
Difficulty in maintaining spiritual growth
What advice returnees give:

Don’t expect too much when you get home. Love your country
Have an open heart and mind to enjoy the reverse culture shocks
Study the subculture and the attitude of society
Be aware of many temptations of worldly stuff
Use the concepts, methods, and principles that we have learned in the U.S. wisely. Contextualize them
Get connected right away to a local church or a Christian fellowship
Trust in the Lord that He will do his best for you
Be in fellowship with the Lord always

What returnees say about their reentry experience:

I really had hard time to adapt my home country because, rather than the U.S., I have so many things to care for
Adjustment from individualism of U.S. to conformity of groups
Adjustment to family, especially with non-Christian parents
I felt everything in Korea is going too fast and sometimes got irritated about being in the crowded places like the subways
I was so happy to see my family first. But it was not easy to walk crowded street with people
Although I was in the U.S. for about 10 months, when I arrived in Korea from airplane, I couldn’t adapt myself to new circumstances. Although they speak Korean, it was not familiar to me at that time. I was used to speak and listen English language
My country is too competitive. I felt like everyone was pressed for time, money and so on. They don’t smile a lot and never say “excuse me” when they passed or even touched me
People are so hard working!!! School’s library was packed even thought it was 2-months winter break
In the U.S., I just enjoyed life with friends. It was very relaxed. However, in Korea, people are so hard working, so I felt like I’m becoming loser. I felt I had to study or work hard like other Koreans, but I didn’t know what to do

For awhile, I expected American things over here. Cars stop when people are crossing the street and people open the door for the next person. When I see these things are not here, frustration comes into myself
It was a little difficult to adjust to new work environment
Adjustment to a different daily work routine
Adjustment to a one-day only weekend in Korea
I worry about my future, looking for a job
How to find a church which makes you comfortable like in America
Finding a good church in their home country if they didn’t have one before
I didn’t have any friends or family who go to church with me. So I felt like lonely and it made me difficult to adjust in new church
FAMILY & SOCIAL

Expect changes in family and friends and in your relationship with them and vice versa
Start maintaining contact through mail with family and friends about changes in you so as to prepare for them
Keep in touch with close friends while you are abroad
Be vulnerable and share your fears and anxieties, excitement and expectations with others as you prepare for reentry
Seek out people who have gone abroad. They’ll be most please to

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Start praying about your return home way ahead of time. Be thinking about problems you may encounter when you return
Build up a good relationship with Christians in the U.S. so that they can be praying for you when you return home
If coming back to a church is difficult, don’t give up and settle in one quickly
Seek Christian fellowship and be close to God
Try not to compare Christian experiences and practices
Get as much ministry exposure and experience
Be prayerful about a ministry strategy for your country
Work slowly and prayerfully and in small ways first, paying attention to the culture and ways of doing things
Remember change takes time, build up your credibility and sense of belonging to the church first

What returnees say about their reentry experience:

GENERAL

Not realistic to expect it is the good old days
Reverse culture shock
Shocking at finding a big gap between what one was taught in the U.S. and what is taught at home in the area of clinical psychology

FAMILY

Adjustment from dorm life to live with family (felt a lot of restrictions)
Felt bound to home and family
Adjustment from individualist life to family life submission to family decision, difficulty in expressing opinions of my own
Living with family sometimes limit my activity
Family pressure to get married
Difficulty with living with a family that doesn’t believe in God. It bothers me when I want to praise Him and share things with them
Conflicts with relatives. Asked pastor to do a Christian funeral for father
My parents did not accept me when I got baptized and became a

SOCIAL

Tobacco fumes, flood of people and hectic lifestyle in Tokyo, too much crammed housing conditions, pressure to socially conform (I have to be dressed well at the time), expectations of a certain type of lady-like behavior on a Japanese girl
Did not know where to buy certain things
Japanese are very short and they bow each other too much
I was used to see all kinds of people around me in the U.S., white, black, hispanic and asian, but when I came back to Japan I could see only Japanese people. I felt that it was strange
Ignorant of events back home (political or social incidents)
Did not know what to do in certain situations (e.g. gift giving, customs concerning weddings)
Environmental change: from rural to urban
Negative perception of overseas experiences. Sharing foreign experience is not welcome

Insistence on new ideas from abroad was not received well the family said: “You are in America just for one year. Your home country is Japan.”

Difficulty in maintaining a broad and flexible perspective

Being overwhelmed with fierce competition without any Christian fellowship

Loneliness, could not find friends

Some friends have gotten married

Member of my volleyball club was changed. And I felt that it was not the club which I was in.

No Christian friend near my town

Living with non-Christians, used to Christian friends

Absence of a Christian friend with whom one can share innermost thoughts

Absence of Christian fellowship: Hard to find Christian friends of the same age

JOB

Difficulty in finding a job that can make use of my experiences

Finding a job especially for female

Inability to work in my chosen specialty

LANGUAGE

Frustration in switching to native language—could not express well in own language

Feelings of inferiority because of lack of confidence in speaking the native language

Assumptions that what has been learned in the U.S. can be applied to local churches right away

What advice returnees give:

GENERAL

Think about reverse culture shock

Maintain a humble spirit (a haughty spirit because one has a college degree can be very destructive)

Be prepared to make adjustments in all aspects

Have a vision but be flexible and open to many options

Be prepared not to reject home

While away keep yourself informed of current events in your home country so that you'll be up-to-date and not be shocked by major changes when you return home

Should not underestimate changes in home country

Be ready to take a back seat position to observe and appreciate changes that happened while you were away

Always introduce and consider home context in all that one is learning while away from home

Meet with fellow nationals frequently while in the U.S.

Take home principles and values; leave behind U.S. context and culture

Don’t simply export American model—be sure to contextualize.
SOCIAL

- New interests that differ significantly from those of local peers
- Being accused of being ‘Americanized’
- Rejection from friends
- Lack of full acceptance in a group or group of friends
- Old ties with friends not strong now or broken, renewing friendships
- Remembering how it used to be to make sure people do not perceive you as a snob, trying to fit in again
- Missing friends in the U.S.
- Different way of showing affection

JOB

- Facing a glutted job market
- Work pressure
- The pressure and pull of the work life is addictive
- Adjustment from the student to working world

LANGUAGE

- Accent is different
- Talk softer, careful about being too open

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

- Difficult to recreate a new spiritual support structure
- Absence of Christian fellowship
- May have difficulty finding a suitable church home
- Requires more effort to integrate into a new church home
- Don’t really fit in the church as a whole in terms of service or in terms of relating to church friends
- Spiritual zest not appreciated at home
- Need to reach out, to get to know, to encourage, to fellowship with other Christians
- Adjustment to a different way of worship
- Danger in losing vision for one’s own country
- Need to be sensitive in home context when introducing a project or ministry which is modeled after the U.S.

What advice returnees give:

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

- Lack of close Christian fellowship I enjoyed in the States
- I could not find a good church
- Difficulty in finding a good Bible teaching church that accepts the returnees as their own sheep. Some churches treat them as outsiders
- Long sermons
- Very small congregations at church

GENERAL

- Do not put too much expectation on going home, nothing is the same
- The most important thing is not to feel confused about different cultures too much, I think
- Don’t worry about reentry difficulties, it happens to everyone, but you will get used to it soon
- Knowing that we are perfectly understood and accepted by God even though nobody seems to understand what we are going through
- Having a secure identity of who you are in Christ, a healthy cultural identity and a wider perspective to accept differences

FAMILY

- Keep in close touch with families and friends. Take note of the changes that happen to them
SOCIAL
Try to accept your own culture and love your own people
Identify fully with the local people
Don’t expect to receive; be ready to give and be the one to serve your people
Be willing to adapt myself to customs of my country
You should accept everything around you. If your class member or club member changes, you should get used to the atmosphere.
It is very important not to push my experiences in the U.S. with others
Stop saying “In America...” because people who I am talking to do not have any experience for the U.S. as I do
Don’t expect too much that everybody wants to listen to your experience in America.
Rather, have a humble, listening attitude. But at the same time, don’t hesitate to share your experience when requested or when appropriate

JOB
While in the U.S. at earlier stages think about developing skills that will help you get a job upon returning home

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
Establish close fellowship with the Lord before you leave the U.S.
Study the Bible and know what God requires of you
Have a good fellowship in the U.S. They will pray for you and write to you
Have a vision, share with an important person (friend or pastor) in North America for prayer and accountability
Keep in touch with the local church
Quickly get involved in a good Christian Fellowship
Try to find a positive opportunity in your home country that the Lord has prepared, especially for you
It is necessary to practice some useful methods and ways for ministries in church which we learned and experienced in the U.S. as soon as possible after returning home
Try to help foreigner in your home country, who are in similar situations as you when you were in the U.S. Ministering to them gives you a sense of worthiness and joy

What returnees say about their reentry experience:

GENERAL
Reverse culture shock
The weather
Adjustment to less space
Difficulty to readjust to standard of living
Feeling restricted, not able to have my say in public back home
Media restrictions
Adjustment from a place where critical thought and ideas are cherished (the university) to a place where independent thought is discouraged (an army boot camp)
Singapore is very rigid in political and social life

FAMILY
Adjusting to a lifestyle that has to take family into consideration - less carefree
Family needs
Family pressure to conform
Pressure from non-Christian parents
Adjustment to family and friends. “Coming home was like re-caging a freed bird.”
Time commitment towards loved ones
Feelings of alienation and isolation from family and friends due to changes in individuals and relationships
Highly competitive educational system for children
Difficulty for children’s schooling
Coping with widespread poverty
Fatalistic attitude of people towards problems
Lesser opportunities
The materialistic influence of the American culture
The easy going Christianity in America
Applicability of North American training/education in native country
Expecting the North American norms and values to be the ideal
Comparison leading to criticism of own culture
Frustration with your own culture and situation because of revised expectations

What advice returnees give:

Do not over-rate yourself. Be more humble
Try to recall the names and faces of your friends even before returning so as not to give the impression that you are a snob
Be aware of continues differences and expectations
Realize that you will (your behaviour, attitudes and personality) be perceived as having changed or is now different
For families, condition children about going home and the changes and re-switching needed
Communicate with your home country before returning to find out where churches are and what Christian activities are happening in your place
Be equipped spiritually

What returnees say about their reentry experience:

GENERAL
Reverse culture shock
Adjustment to more people living in my city, lifestyle of my fellow countrymen, disorganization of the community and dirt
Male chauvinism
Adjustment from an aggressive and independent atmosphere
Difference between the open American culture and the more conservative home culture
Close-mindedness and more cultural restrictions
Adjusting to local constraints and culture
Being considered as second class citizens
Feelings of superiority due to international experience and travel
Unduly critical attitude about local things/events
Can identify with the home countries short comings, and also with the status quo or the typical ‘that’s how it works here, you’re no more in the States.’ statement
I have seen my country develop into a more organized place and I found that people all around are being more self-centered than before
FAMILY & SOCIAL

How to respect elders
Reacquainted to the realities of family obligations and concern or pressure concerning their marital status
For former Muslims who became Christian in the U.S., they will be disowned by their families
High expectations of a returning graduate (do well in all their undertaking)
I think things had not really change a lot but people had changed
People tend to have the impression that I am back from overseas and I have much experience in me compared to them. Thus, they feel that I am very different from them because they think that I speak very differently from them

JOB

Facing a glutted job market

CHURCH EXPERIENCE/CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Difficulty in finding a good church
Absence of Christian fellowship, support, and security
Overdependence on the church while in North America makes it hard to find a good church at home
Perception by the receiving church that my ideas and proposals are too western

What advice returnees give:

List the things you will likely miss e.g. inconveniences. Be mentally prepared for them
Prepare for reentry at least 6 months before returning home
Go slow, stay low, don't blow. Change does not come overnight
Let your parents know as much as possible how your views have changed so it won't be hard for them to accept the changes
It takes time for people to cope with your returning as they already live without you for a couple of months or maybe years
Be flexible
Be content in all circumstances
Be a servant. Start with a servant’s attitude
To be affirmed of what you’d believe is beneficial, and not to give up upon returning. Rather, embrace it and pray that it will one day change the culture