

# Preparing for Your Reentry Transition

Lessons from Asian Returnees



INTERVARSITY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP/USA  
International Student Ministry  
6400 Schroeder Road  
Madison, WI 53711  
608.274.9001

Web: [www.intervarsity.org/ism](http://www.intervarsity.org/ism)  
Email: [ism@intervarsity.org](mailto:ism@intervarsity.org)

FIELD TEST EDITION



## Resource List:

### Article

Chinn, Lisa Espineli. "Reverse Culture Shock and the Reentry Transition" in International On Campus 2004. Located at page 16 - 19 at <<http://www.intervarsity.org/ism/article/2639>>

### Books

Austin, Clyde. Cross-Cultural Reentry: A Book of Readings. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1986.

Chinn, Lisa Espineli. Think Home: A Practical Guide for Christian International Preparing to Return Home. Colorado Springs, CO: International Students Incorporated, 2000.

Mirza, Nate. Home Again: Preparing International Students to Serve Christ in Their Home Countries. Colorado Springs, CO: Dawson Media, 2005.

Storti, Craig. The Art of Coming Home. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2001.

### 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/](http://www.intervarsity.org/store/ism/)>

### Video

Urbana 06 - International Students Track Video. Madison: WI: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, 2007. Can be purchased at <[www.intervarsity.org/store/ism/](http://www.intervarsity.org/store/ism/)>

### 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](http://www.acmi-net.net/acmi-link)

International Fellowship of Evangelical Students: [www.ifesworld.org](http://www.ifesworld.org)

Japanese Christian Fellowship Network: [www.jcfn.org](http://www.jcfn.org)

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**Section 3**  
**Resource List**

**3. What do you need to focus on as you prepare for your reentry?**

## **Section 1 Returning Home to Asia**

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.

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

## 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?

## Section 2

### Reflection Questions

#### 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

## What returnees say about their reentry experience:

### 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 though 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, excitements 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 ones own country  
 Need to be sensitive in home context when introducing a project or ministry which is modeled after the U.S.

**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

**What advice returnees give:****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



## What returnees say about their reentry experience:

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

