Be Our Guest: Strategies for Making Your Campus More Welcoming to Chinese Undergraduate Students

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Be Our Guest¹:
Strategies for Making Your Campus
More Welcoming to Chinese Undergraduate Students

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¹ I say this with a nod to the song from Beauty and the Beast: “Be our guest, be our guest, put our service to the test…” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afzmwAKUppU>; <http://www.disney.co.uk/musicaltheatre/beautyuk/song/lyricsguest.htm>. Initial working titles were “Better late than never” and “Now is the time,” but I eventually decided to invoke the metaphor of host/guest to establish the fundamental relationship between U.S. colleges and universities and their Chinese undergraduate students.

² I have, in my best approximation, taught 2000 Chinese undergraduate students during the period 2004-2016. A few hundred of these were undergraduates at The Ohio State University, in Columbus, Ohio, enrolled in Advanced ESL Composition class, and 1500+ were undergraduates at Wuhan University, in Wuhan, Hubei Province, P.R. China, enrolled in the Wuhan University Summer Intensive English Program. I have also led 250+ faculty, staff, and students to China during the same twelve-year period.
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      1. Whenever possible, involve domestic undergraduate students
      2. Avoid compartmentalization of int’l students and services for them--there’s no such thing as “separate but equal” services
      3. A long-term vision requires Chinese staff and/or staff who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to aspects of Chinese culture
      4. Faculty are a big part of the solution and should be fully on-board
      5. If you collect an international student surcharge, make sure the value returned to international students exceeds the amount you collect.
      6. Do the little things--which are inexpensive but highly symbolic--like making hot water easily accessible to Chinese students on your campus
      7. Remember that most Chinese undergraduates have been prohibited from doing anything but study during K-12; the freedom of a U.S. college/university will initially overwhelm them
      8. Send as many faculty/staff/students as you can to China to develop affinity

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I. Introduction

One of the most fundamental relationships in Chinese culture—probably the most important after parent/child—is host/guest. The notion of hosting is essential to the Chinese and has clearly-defined roles...so too does the understanding of being a guest. Currently, the United States has over 325,000 Chinese student *guests* in our country who are hoping to be treated as such. **Colleges and universities need to take to heart the notion of being a good host and create campuses that truly welcome Chinese students and make them feel like a valued guest.**

It is no secret that colleges and universities around the United States have enrolled Chinese students in record numbers recently—seeing them more than double in the last 5 years alone, from 157,558 in 2010 to 328,547 in 2015.4

This number is more startling when extracting the slightly increasing, but relatively stable, population of roughly 60,000 Chinese graduate students. Factoring this in, the undergraduate population from mainland China has essentially gone from only a few thousand students 10 years ago to over 200,000 in 2015. Amazingly, at OSU we have gone from 85 Chinese undergraduates in 2007 to 2741 in 2016.

This is the situation we find ourselves in now—in many cases almost desperately trying to find strategies for integrating undergraduate students from mainland China to our campuses.

Interestingly, Chinese graduate students have been somewhat successfully woven into the fabric

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4 Annual data in the early 2000’s—with a stable figure of ~60,000 (mainly graduate) students and annual fluctuations between -5% to 3% suggest that 2005 is the beginning of the so-called “Chinese enrollment surge.” The increase from 2005 to 2006 was 8.2% and has been closer to 20% in most years and topped out at 30% from 2008 to 2009. <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students/Leading-Places-of-Origin>
of U.S. colleges and universities for a few decades, and made significant contributions as researchers, students, and even instructors/teaching assistants. Also, ethnic Chinese undergraduate students from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Malaysia are not new to our campuses. But what this most recent decade has seen is an unprecedented surge in enrollment by one particular group of culturally-identifiable population: 18-22 year-old, recent high school graduates (and transfer students) from Mainland China.

Of course these students are not homogenous—some are from the city, and some are from the countryside; some are actually quite rich, but many aren’t; some arrive with a laser-beam focus on academic work, some are here to party; a handful are ready to jump right in and join a fraternity or sorority, but the vast majority are too shy/timid to even talk to domestic students; some want to find jobs in the U.S. after graduation, some can’t wait to return to China; finally, some are here because they dreamt of it for years, while some are here at their parents’ insistence.

In many ways, Chinese undergraduates are exactly the same as students from other foreign countries, and actually similar to domestic students. But in many identifiable ways, Chinese undergraduate students are unique, and these unique traits and expectations can be successfully addressed by colleges and universities who formulate a comprehensive and strategic plan to do so.

Simply put, most U.S. colleges and universities currently lack the capacity to uphold their ethical duty to undergraduate students from Mainland China...but that doesn’t mean they lack

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5 It seems obvious that a university has an ethical duty to meet the needs of all their students, which is why universities have robust programs such as Wellness, Counseling and Consultation, Student Advocacy, Student-Athlete Support Services, and Disability Services. To be clear: if a university can’t meet the needs of certain identifiable populations of students, it should not enroll them. But certainly, if a
good intentions. Enrollment services and admissions offices--perhaps at the encouragement of fiscal officers, deans, or even presidents--have recruited, admitted, and enrolled massive numbers of Chinese undergraduate students. Unfortunately, this sometimes happens in ethically questionable ways, usually to plug budget gaps--and admissions offices have left it to faculty, staff, and domestic students to adapt.

In some cases this has created a climate of hostility and dissatisfaction on campus. Many domestic students view Chinese students as curve-busters and competition in the job market--or even worse, people who are only enrolled because of money. Staff sometimes find Chinese students too pushy or offensive, with questionable mannerisms. Faculty often see them as a burden--sitting silently in class in large groups, never contributing, but rushing the podium with questions after class when the instructor is trying to get out the door.

Thoughtful efforts to build bridges to domestic students, staff, and faculty should have been done 10 years ago--before Chinese undergraduates started arriving--but weren’t.

Fortunately, it isn’t too late. **Now, we must employ culturally sensitive strategies to create a**

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6 One small, liberal arts college in Ohio contacted a colleague and me several years ago and simply asked us to “bring back 75 Chinese students” from our summer language program in China. When we insisted on staff being hired at their college to meet the needs of these students, along with other additional resources to ease the transition, their interest quickly faded. I also heard of another university in Ohio who asked a recruiter to provide 200+ students for a new online MBA platform. Finally, another university in Ohio works with a recruiter who directly enrolls graduates of several Chinese high schools to a regional campus.

7 “Admitting international students for the wrong reasons brings down the university,” Nov. 4, 2014. (Anonymous instructor at Miami University refers to international students as “dead weight” and pronounces the “displayed English literacy” of all international students there as “abhorrent.”) http://miamistudent.net/?p=17002763

8 D. Holdorf, *Not Here or There: Chinese students at OU just try to be themselves.* http://2011.soulofathens.com/our-dreams-are-different/not-here-or-there-1.html

9 Recently, I received an email from a staff member who complained that “some international students place their fingers in or about their mouths during a conversation,” which caused her great discomfort...

10 In this regard, the issue of enfranchising Chinese undergraduates isn’t too different from the situation Beverly Daniel Tatum addresses in her important work “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria,” <http://www.amazon.com/Black-Kids-Sitting-Together-Cafeteria/dp/0465083617>
sense of belongingness for Chinese students so they reach their potential personally, contribute to the globalization of our campuses, and become satisfied and engaged alumni for the rest of their lives.

This paper will serve as a blueprint for how colleges and universities can draw largely on existing resources to make an immediate improvement in conditions for Chinese undergraduates, while at the same time creating a set of strategies for the future. I have divided it into three sections with 1) immediate, 2) short-term, and 3) long term strategies. Within each section, I make recommendations for utilizing existing skills/talents/resources of undergraduate students (domestic and Chinese), staff, and faculty. Of course this sort of strategic planning should have taken place years ago, before the exponential Chinese enrollment surge, but it isn’t too late and there are low-cost steps that can be taken immediately to have a significant impact.

II. Immediate Steps to Take

There are many things that can be done immediately, at no cost, to create a sense of belongingness for Chinese undergraduates at your institution. The best advice is to take advantage of the talents of existing student leaders to engage Chinese and domestic students. Also, encourage staff to engage undergraduate students in cultural awareness workshops. Finally, expect faculty to be part of the solution and incentivize their involvement with recognition within the department, during promotion & tenure review, if possible.

A. Chinese undergraduates

You will find Chinese undergraduates to be some of the best students you’ve ever worked with. They are generally sincere, earnest, diligent, conscientious, and kind. If you take one step toward them, they will take two steps toward you. They are waiting, and expecting, to be
made to feel like a guest in our country. Keep in mind that these students (and their families) would roll out the red carpet if you ever stepped foot in their hometown. I have enjoyed that sort of hospitality when visiting former students in China and it is staggering. It is the sort of hospitality that motivates me to always invite students and their parents to my house for dinner when they come to town for graduation.

For decades, higher education has been striving to meet the needs of underrepresented students, first-generation college students, students of color, female students, student-athletes, and students with disabilities...but considerably fewer resources have been allocated to meeting the needs of international students. Chinese students on your campus have perhaps the most pressing and urgent needs of any students.

This might seem self-evident, but the first thing you should do is ask Chinese students how they are doing and whether their needs are being met. This can be done informally by just starting a conversation with them at the library, campus coffee shop, or when riding the bus; it can also be done formally by taking a survey. **But there’s nothing stopping any college administrator from getting up from the computer right now and starting a conversation with a Chinese undergraduate student.** Try it--you will be amazed at how easy it is...and the smile you receive in return for asking the question How are you doing?\(^{11}\), will make it all worthwhile. Approach Chinese undergraduate students in the library, on your campus bus, in a snack bar or recreation center, and you will be amazed how exuberantly they react.

\(^{11}\) Be advised you might need to ask this question several times before you get an honest answer. You might also need to really stress that you want to know the truth. Chinese students have been ingrained with the notion “if you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all” and will speak indirectly to avoid direct criticisms. Reassure students you want to know the truth even if it has a negative tone. Tell them being honest is the only way we can seek improvements together. **Remember while listening to look for the statements that start with “maybe” or “perhaps”...Chinese students use this language as a way to soften their language.**
You can also connect Chinese students with existing committees on campus. I’ll give you a perfect example. At Ohio State, we have a university-wide committee of career advisers. And I happen to be the adviser for a Chinese student organization called IUFO (International Undergraduates with Future Orientation). IUFO is an organization founded by Chinese students to help international students write resumes, network informally and formally, and find internships. After being invited to speak to the university-wide committee of career advisers, it occurred to me, why not connect the students of IUFO with the committee of career advisers for monthly lunch-and-learn sessions where they get into small groups and talk about articles. The first meeting will take place next month, and be a discussion of the recent New York Times article “Inside a Chinese Test-Prep Factory.”

Total cost? Nothing, or maybe the cost of some pizzas if the career advisers decide to provide them.

If you had any personal contact at all with any Chinese student who has now graduated, and you still have their email address, simply write to them—even out of the blue—and ask how they’re doing. Actually, first ask what they are doing so you can begin to understand what Chinese undergraduates do after they complete their degrees. You can also conduct a quick survey of your recent graduates. First, you will collect valuable information about their satisfaction and their post-graduate plans. Secondly, you will send them a message that even though they’re gone, you still value them. Third, it will give you a chance to plant the seed that your college/university should have a Chinese alumni club.

B. Domestic undergraduates

Quickly identify leaders of undergraduate student organizations, including your undergraduate student government. **Ask instructors which Chinese students in their classes**
are outspoken and give their opinions readily - they are the emergent leaders. Appeal to these students to start legitimately reaching-out to international students. I recently talked to two leaders of “Block-O,” the school spirit organization at OSU, and asked them what they were doing to engage international students. The membership coordinator weakly replied they had a table at a new student involvement fair; the coordinator of the basketball cheering section shrugged his shoulders--he was doing nothing--despite admitting he always saw groups of Chinese students at the recreation center playing basketball. When asked how many Chinese students sat in the student cheering section at games, he said none. This is an incredible missed opportunity--many Chinese students arrive in the U.S. as big basketball fans, so why weren’t they being included? These domestic students weren’t opposed to the idea of outreach to Chinese undergraduates at all--they just didn’t know they should do it...it wasn’t one of their core values to do so. Now, I think they will.

Another opportunity at Ohio State is our extensive network of registered student organizations. Most colleges and universities are struggling to hire staff who have expertise with Chinese culture and Chinese students (and whose salary/benefits can be quite expensive), so why not provide programming grants\(^\text{13}\) to existing student organizations who create joint programming with Chinese student organizations, or who create programming which targets Chinese students. In this way, you are not only providing social/cultural/co-curricular opportunities for Chinese students, but you are also sending a message to your domestic students that the administration values Chinese students and domestic students should value their presence on campus as well. Finally, by increasing the likelihood that domestic and international

\(^{13}\) It might not even be necessary to provide additional funding; since most colleges/universities provide funds to registered student organizations with certain conditions, additional conditions could be proof of outreach to international students, an international student outreach plan as part of their constitution, an officer position in each organization whose role it is to promote including international students, etc.
students interact with each other, you are building the global competencies of domestic students. It is no secret that companies want to hire graduates who are a good cultural fit in the workplace and increasingly this means working alongside internationally-diverse co-workers.\textsuperscript{14}

E. Staff

Staff at every college and university have the greatest stake in creating a welcoming climate for Chinese undergraduates. They are having interactions and conversations with Chinese students every day--financial aid, advising, career counseling, residential life issues, dining hall issues, recreation and wellness issues, etc. Staff should immediately be made aware of the willingness of Chinese students to be part of the solution. The Chinese are all ingrained with 5000 years of history and culture and have an inherent motivation and happiness to share their cultural heritage and lifestyle with outsiders.

Staff need to know they aren’t alone and aren’t expected to mysteriously or magically become experts at working with Chinese students. They should be taking every chance they get to educate themselves about China and Chinese students, and realize that even asking a student about his/her hometown is a first step. Staff should familiarize themselves with a map of China and locate the places where most students come from: Beijing (in the north), Shanghai (somewhat, the south), Guanzhou (very southern, close to Hong Kong). They will also have many students from Suzhou (an hour outside of Shanghai), Tianjin (an hour outside of Beijing), and Xi’an/Wuhan/Changsha (Central China).

Try this: order a map of China online and hang it in your office\textsuperscript{15}. Let students point to their hometown and tell you a little bit about it. Or even easier/cheaper/better, make a map of

\textsuperscript{14} http://www.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/worklife/11/02/cb.hire.reasons.job/

\textsuperscript{15}
China the desktop image on your computer so you see it every day. Simple questions like, “What is your hometown famous for?” (they are all famous for something whether it is food, a mountain, or famous people from there), will go a long way and you will see the faces of Chinese undergraduates light up. Most Chinese outside the country learn quickly that Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong are the only “famous” Chinese places in the world and will humbly say their hometown is China to avoid having to explain where they are from.

If staff also pay attention to news stories relating to China, focusing on positive ones, they can make better small-talk with Chinese students. Although you could talk about more serious issues related to China later--human rights, Tiananmen Square, the pollution, Taiwan--definitely avoid making these your conversation starter. You should also have canned responses if Chinese students directly ask you What do you think about Taiwan?, or What do you think about Tibet? Chinese undergraduates in particular, who have probably never been encouraged to think about controversial topics in ambiguous ways--instead always being taught black/white, yes/no, binaries--might surprise you with the direct questions they ask you at the outset of a conversation...but don’t be worried, they are just getting an initial read on you.

\[\text{15}<\text{http://www.amazon.com/24x30-China-Educational-Poster-Print/dp/B000FHSB7C/ref=sr_1_5?ie=UTF8&qid=1422803479&sr=8-5&keywords=map+of+china}>.\]
\[\text{16} \text{This one works well for me: } <\text{http://www.ezilon.com/maps/asia/china-maps.html}>.\]
\[\text{17} \text{“I have always been taught that it is part of China,” is a particularly satisfactory response to this and even though it leaves open the question of whether you actually believe what you’ve been taught, it sends a signal that you know enough about Chinese culture to avoid making Chinese people uncomfortable when you are just getting to know them.}\]
\[\text{18} \text{You might also be surprised/shocked/amazed at the way there is no cultural barrier amongst the Chinese which prevents them from making comments like “you look a little fatter this year,” or “you look old.” Americans in China are also often asked, quite directly, what their salary is, how much their house costs, etc. This is always just benign information gathering, no different than “how much does a Mercedes cost in America?”}\]
The same goes for symbolic importance of keeping track of Chinese holidays. Knowledge of these holidays will go a long way to express welcomeness and belongingness to Chinese undergraduates. The major holidays are Mid-Autumn Festival (also known as the Moon Festival), Spring Festival (also known as Chinese New Year), Lantern Festival, Tomb Sweeping Festival, and Dragon Boat Festival - May Labor Day Holiday. Most festivals have a particular food and story that is associated with it, so being aware of this is also helpful. Chinese students are always amazed at any nugget of cultural awareness about China that is revealed to them and will be profoundly touched if you went so far as to wish them happy new year during the Spring Festival, and if you decorate your office with decorations from a Chinese grocery store, it will go a long way to show not just Chinese students you acknowledge them but also domestic students that you recognize the presence of Chinese students and embrace their traditions.

F. Faculty

Faculty should start immediately to learn how to pronounce Chinese names. This sounds incredibly basic, but it is a significant start. Of course staff should do this too, but it seems more important that a teacher should know the names--and how to pronounce them--of all their students. There are many videos on youtube to help with this, so there’s no need to host a special workshop or invite a speaker. I made one of these videos with a GTA in our ESL program, but I’m not even sure it’s the best one out there. If you google “how to pronounce Chinese names” one of the best videos I found was created by a member of the online gaming

19 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_Chinese_holidays suffices as an introduction to Chinese festivals
20 http://go.osu.edu/chinesenames [452 views as of 2/1/15]
community for League of Legends²¹, because apparently some of the best LOL players are Chinese. Deans and department chairs especially should be circulating these videos and fostering a culture of respect and dignity for Chinese students on campus. Mandarin Chinese pronunciations, like other languages, have a couple tricky spots but those can be isolated and practiced (ex. words/names that start with q or x in Pinyin).

The next thing faculty can do is simply promote and explain the concept of office hours to Chinese students. Office hours are also a new concept to domestic students, but for some reason, the concept—a teacher having an open door during those times—is less culturally distant for domestic students than it is to Chinese students. I suspect that most U.S. high school students had at least a few teachers they would talk to and were close to, but in Chinese high schools—designed on a Confucian, high power distance, hierarchical model—those relationships almost certainly didn’t exist. So, U.S. instructors should really invite Chinese undergraduates to come to their offices and introduce themselves and have a chat.

Additionally, I would encourage U.S. instructors to take a walk across campus with Chinese students, maybe introducing them to some part of campus—a monument, public space, or interesting architectural spot—where the student wouldn’t have otherwise gone. Likewise, U.S. instructors might also find it refreshing to grab a cup of coffee or tea with Chinese undergraduate students and would be surprised that most Chinese students would try and pay. It’s true. Students in China are trained with the belief they should show respect to their teachers by treating them, and U.S. faculty/staff should be careful about preventing it. Sometimes Chinese students can be quite tricky in their means to do so, and quite insistent as well. The trump card when you are with Chinese students is the phrase “I insist.” If you find yourself in a position

²¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NebMnUvtCF4 [87,855 views and counting]
where you are fighting over a check with a student--who may in fact be putting on a demonstration of respect by fighting for it--you can ultimately end the discussion by insisting that you pay.

III. Short-term Steps to Take

If you are in the middle of the school year, you are probably in survival mode, just trying to keep your head above water and not start too many ambitious initiatives. But you should start making a list now of the things you can do over the summer to improve your campus by next fall to make it more welcoming to Chinese undergraduates. The summer provides the perfect opportunity to relax, reflect, and re-boot.

A. Chinese undergraduates

Most Chinese undergraduates will go back to China for the summer. Therefore, they can be a great resource for your college/university while they are there. For one thing, they make excellent tour guides if any of your faculty/staff take a trip to China.

It might surprise you, but there is probably a group on social media, particularly Chinese platforms like QQ and WeChat, where incoming students can communicate with each other. These get started in the spring, as soon as students begin to receive their acceptances. There might even be students getting together to meet before they come to your campus. These incoming students often take great initiative in planning online meet-ups, face-to-face get-togethers, and even small trips to other cities to meet their future classmates.

Beyond all of this, we discovered at Ohio State that two separate undergraduate student organizations were conducting Pre-Departure Orientations for incoming students. In one case,
the group I advise, IUFO, held PDOs in 11 cities across China. These unofficial, student-led, and free-to-the-university orientations were happening contemporaneously with official, university-sponsored PDOs which we were hosting in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou.

So, before your Chinese students leave for the summer, **reach out to them and see how they might be an asset to your school by contributing to WeChat and Weibo discussions for incoming students or in-country orientations.** Since Chinese undergraduates don’t come to campus over the summer for proper orientations, this informal network to spread information could become an essential part of your orientation strategy for international students.

You should also **recruit a few Chinese undergraduates to return to campus early and be part of the orientation/welcome week events as well as the move-in team.** At Ohio State, a few hundred students arrive to the campus residence halls a few days before the official move-in day (Orientation Welcome Leaders, or OWLs) and participate in team building social activities. It is crucial that Chinese undergraduates are part of all these efforts. It is imperative that you spot the emerging Chinese student leaders on your campus and cultivate them as an incredible asset for your institution.

Another incredible asset for your college/university will be recent alumni, especially if they are back in China. They have grown and matured while attending your university and will be eager to stay connected and promote their experience to others. Your alumni development office should be reaching-out to them and perhaps providing small funds to host networking events in the larger cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Keep in mind that all of these networking events for current or incoming students can also be recruiting events and/or fundraisers.
B. Domestic undergraduates

Domestic undergraduate students should be part of the short-term efforts as well. They should realize how valuable Chinese undergraduates are when they see them as part of orientation/welcome week/move-in activities. Remember that on your campus, Chinese undergraduates are an underrepresented minority. Regardless of their financial standing or the educational attainment of their parents, they are essentially in the same position as first-time college students—everything is new to them and unfamiliar. There’s a small chance their parents could have been in the wave of graduate students who studied in the US starting in the 1970s and 1980s, but that is unlikely. So, domestic students should be sensitized to their presence and should witness the faculty/staff embracing Chinese undergraduates, so they will be motivated to do so as well.

Domestic students should be put in positions—on orientation/welcome week teams, for instance—where they are partners with international students. One of the best examples of this is the Annual Thanksgiving Dinner hosted at OSU. It is the largest university-sponsored Thanksgiving Dinner in the country, serving almost 2000 meals on two seatings. But the uniquely impressive part of it is that there is a student committee providing most of the leadership and this committee is always headed by a Chinese undergraduate and an African-American undergraduate. This is a powerful alliance of non-majority students at your institution and one which should be cultivated. A commonality of experience between these two groups might not seem apparent on the surface, but Chinese students and African American students—who enroll at OSU in nearly similar numbers—share many aspects in common…the most

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22 According to the data-rich Fifteenth Day Enrollment Report for Autumn 2014, there were 3630 African American students at OSU and 3712 Chinese. This marks the first time Chinese students have out-
important being their constant struggle to feel the same sense of belongingness in all aspects of the institution as white students.

**Colleges and universities need to create low-cost ways for domestic students to travel to China on short-term tours as soon as possible.** In the last two years, I have taken three groups of OSU students to China on 10-day trips to participate in cultural exchange at universities around China.\(^{23}\) As long as these trips are taken off-peak, it is quite easy to control the costs and offer this life-changing opportunity for $2500 or less. During these trips, domestic students--who sit next to Chinese undergraduates in class, or work alongside them in the dining commons--can get a small taste of what it’s like to travel across the Pacific and live in a culture that is very different than their own. There is no substitute for the kind of empathy this can create. On one of my trips, a student who had a Chinese co-worker at the campus coffeeshop told me on the third day of the trip that he’d never felt like he had anything to talk about with his Chinese co-worker, but couldn’t wait to get back and ask her about her hometown and share his experiences in China with her.

C. **Staff**

Senior administrators at every college should formulate a strategic plan for staff development. This should include encouraging staff to engage in professional development activities themselves--which can be anything from reading books and academic articles about the Chinese student experience (familiarizing themselves first with the K-12 Chinese experience so they can understand how incredibly different life at a U.S. college and university is) to attending numbered African American students.

\(^{23}\) [Exchange Program Expands Horizons of African-American Males](http://diverseeducation.com/article/73634/)

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\(^{17}\)

conferences such as NAFSA or even participating in a short-term trip to China. There is really no substitute for taking staff to China but this has obvious challenges such as the expense.  

In the meantime, since money (and vacation time) is tight, every Chinese undergraduate student on campus is able to report about his/her experiences in the Chinese educational system. For the price of a cup of coffee or tea, staff can learn more from a first-hand source than they might in the same hour at a workshop or seminar. By interacting with Chinese students, staff can begin to piece together their own understanding of Chinese culture. Also, augmenting this with books can give staff more confidence that they understand Chinese students and can more efficiently and effectively meet their needs. A list of books and articles appears in Appendix A.

When interacting with Chinese undergraduates, it is important to keep in mind that they are likely to nod in agreement and not ask questions as a sign of respect. It isn’t in their habit to interrupt to ask clarifying questions, and they will likely need to be told several times it is okay to ask questions. Be patient--you are expecting them to completely retrain themselves from previous communication principles and habits.

D. Faculty

Faculty should consider every opportunity to globalize their course materials. This can be as simple as adding an article or two which acknowledges the presence of an international perspective on issues. One thing I might not exactly encourage--especially in the short-term--is designing a separate course that is “the international course.” We live in a globalized world, we have created campuses that feel the effects of globalization, and instead of being compartmentalized, globalization should be integrated and mainstreamed wherever possible.

24 If staff can travel to China off-peak, such as during spring break, it is quite possible to get plane tickets for less than $1000 and in-country expenses do not need to be expensive. In total, I have taken many faculty/staff/students to China for a 10-day trip during in March and the rough total cost is $2500/person.
This also has the added benefit of not requiring lengthy and sometimes tedious curriculum review committees. Again, deans and department chairs should simply encourage instructors to incorporate global perspectives into their course design where possible, and then share their best practices. This should be high impact and low cost.

IV. Long-term Steps to Take

A. Chinese undergraduates

It would be impossible to overstate what a tremendous asset these students are. And the fascinating thing is that they pay to be on our campuses and in many cases will volunteer for you. In an alternate reality, I could almost imagine U.S. colleges and universities importing international undergraduate students to give domestic students a global viewpoint in the classroom. Of course that isn’t the case, but that’s how valuable international undergraduates are.

Every department and unit on campus should strive to employ at least one Chinese undergraduate student. These students can be a valuable resource for upper-level administrators and staff who are not very likely to have much China experience or expertise. To be frank, when the current leaders of colleges and universities around the United States were students themselves, almost none of them would have studied in China, studied Chinese or Chinese culture, or had any reason to expect that in the span of 5-10 years, Chinese undergraduate students would be overwhelming our systems for admissions, academic services, counseling, career services, etc.

So, it is these high-level decision-makers who are often the least aware of Chinese culture and least aware of what day-to-day life is like for Chinese undergraduates. Working close at hand with Chinese undergraduate student workers will create both awareness and hopefully
affinity. Even a few hours a week in a part-time job will help create a sense of belongingness in Chinese students, which has to be the overall goal. If recent graduates come back to campus for a visit, they will have an office, and a few staff or faculty members, who they are connected to...who can welcome them back with a smile and a hug. Finally, **having Chinese undergraduates in each office will also help them create an informal network where students can help each other problem-solve issues on campus.**

Colleges and universities should also cultivate relationships with recent alumni, who can **help create bilingual materials**, among other things. Many Chinese undergraduates will be happy to be remembered and grateful for the chance to make contributions to create a more welcome community for the Chinese students who come after them. For instance, I am still relying on a former student who graduated in 2009 to help me produce recruiting materials (in Chinese) for our summer intensive language program. The fee he asked for? As much pizza as he could eat during his next visit at a local pizzeria we visited a few times while he was on campus.

Staff members and faculty should identify Chinese undergraduates with this sort of potential when they are juniors and seniors, and nurture relationships with them. Simply taking a Chinese student out to lunch once a semester is a real expression that you value the relationship and want to maintain it. If staff members and faculty start doing this in a concerted effort, word will spread amongst the Chinese community that they are valued members of the community.²⁵

B. Domestic undergraduates

²⁵ For an outstanding, and in-depth understanding of this, please consult my friend Pat McAloon’s (2104) informative book *Studying in China: A Practical Handbook for Students*, p. 254-259, wherein he describes in great detail the concept of “renqing,” a concept that lacks an equivalent in English other than “human sentiment.” According to McAloon, Chinese understand renqing through three elements: “shared interests, shared time, and reciprocity” (p. 255).
The long-range plan of every university with regards to domestic undergraduates has to include a strategy to promote traditional study abroad opportunities. Currently, disincentives to study abroad are cost and uncertainty. The simple thought of the expense of an international plane ticket is a deterrent, and then there is the cost of the program itself—quite often with costs built into the program for tuition, for the university to make some money, or often to cover the expenses associated with the university staff member on the trip.

A few years ago, I was helping a department organize a study abroad opportunity for graduate students to go to China, and one reason we tried to recruit as many participants was to decrease the share of the adviser’s costs that each participant would have to pay. These are costs that need to be reduced or eliminated. Alternately, the university should be subsidizing the students to go abroad, not the other way around. I am proud that OSU is meeting this challenge head-on, with their innovate STEP initiative, which grants $2000 to every sophomore student who completes a year-long co-curricular program with an adviser who will help them design, in many cases, their own study abroad experience.

The goal of increasing study abroad participation for domestic students has secondary benefits that accrue to the institution: domestic students who go abroad (especially those I know who have gone to China) return with increased affinity for Chinese undergraduates. These domestic students can be the leaders and influence other domestic students in their peer groups to have more affinity for Chinese classmates.
The most important aspect of a long-term strategy for making your campus more welcome to Chinese undergraduates is to hire and retain new staff who are experts in working with Chinese students. This includes staff who are Chinese, staff who speak Chinese, staff who have lived in China, staff who have written dissertations and researched about the experiences and needs of Chinese sojourner students in the U.S., etc. One of the biggest mistakes a college or university can make is taking existing staff—who may be doing a great job in their current position, and whom everyone might absolutely love working with—and asking them to “play out of position” and work closely with Chinese undergraduates. It devalues our specializations to think anyone can do them. We would never confuse academic advisers with career advisers, we wouldn’t ask either to give actual counseling...so why is there a tendency on college campuses to think that staff who were hired to process visas can provide academic advising to Chinese students? Or career counseling? Or emotional counseling? It is also suboptimal to ask staff who were tasked with recruiting Chinese undergraduates to be the ones to provide them with orientation. An example from Ohio State illustrates this well.

We have an outstanding orientation program which occurs each summer, with domestic students coming to Columbus and to campus for a highly-developed, well-planned, thoughtful orientation to OSU. For obvious reasons, international students cannot simply come to Columbus for an overnight in the middle of the summer. So, when Chinese undergraduates arrive, they have historically been given a half-day orientation by the staff of the Office of International Affairs. These staff are highly professional and do their best, but it isn’t the same. Literally, it isn’t the same because it isn’t as long or detailed. Further, the first day or two after an undergraduate Chinese student arrives must be the worst time possible to bombard them with a lot of
decontextualized information, some of it absolutely vital to their health and safety, not to mention their academic success.

With this in mind, the Office of Student Life, Office of International Affairs, and First-Year Experience program at OSU have invested heavily in a costly but important in-country two-day summer orientation for Chinese undergraduates. It was first undertaken in 2013 and was refined for 2014. Hopefully each year it will involve more and more Chinese undergraduates themselves. But for the few hundred Chinese undergraduates who cannot/do not attend the PDO in China (and for the international undergraduates from all other countries), they receive the usual, inadequate half-day orientation as soon as they arrive.

As a final suggestion, staff in every unit on campus should try and put as much important information as possible online in short video modules that can be watched and re-watched if necessary. When students are confronted with lots of speculative information as soon as they arrive--what to do if they are the victim of a crime, what to do if they need to drop a class, etc--it simply goes in one ear and out the other. Having just landed in a new country, what use does a Chinese undergraduate have for information about contacting the police? Later in the semester, when they need it, students need to be able to find everything online in an easily viewable format. This will be proactive in nature because a student who does find him or herself in trouble will most likely contact Chinese friends in their close friendship circle (“quanzi”), and ask their advice. Some of the most sensitive information--such as the resources available to you if you are the victim of sexual violence--should probably be made available in Chinese.

The same goes for information about plagiarism, which is another highly sensitive issue for Chinese students and perhaps the most talked about and focused on in American academic circles. Information about the realities of plagiarism and other forms of academic
misconduct should be made available to Chinese undergraduates before they get on the plane for the U.S. Even if they are supposed to learn this during their ESL class or first-year composition class, it may be too late if they have already copied their biology homework from a friend in the second week of the semester, or cut/pasted a review from Amazon’s website onto the discussion board in their literature class. Most importantly, these materials should be developed by professionals from your campus ESL program because they are the experts in delivering content in culturally-appropriate ways for non-native learners. Just like ESL teachers would not give advice about visas, why would visa certification specialists give advice about plagiarism?

Simply put, the long-term goal of all staff units on college and university campuses should be to create all the vital information for Chinese undergraduates in ways that are sensitive to their challenges as non-native learners and put it in digital format and online so it is retrievable 24/7/365; ideally the most important information will be presented in Chinese.

D. Faculty

In the long-term, even if it doesn’t involve creating new courses for the curriculum, departments can still re-consider their current curricular features such as lecture-based classrooms and decide whether flipped, activity-based classrooms would create more opportunities for domestic and international students to interact inside the classroom.

Especially in the ESL, or language programs at your university, de-emphasize linguistic remediation in favor of intercultural communications strategies. Replace grammar workbooks and decontextualized, generic cultural lessons for curricular materials that are specific to your

students and your campus. Require students to engage with campus offices and resources, and treat the campus as your classroom. Ask students to create podcasts or videos about their activities which they can share with other Chinese undergraduates, and ask them do their research papers about topics specifically related to the Chinese undergraduate experience. After they have conducted the research and done their papers, have them translate their knowledge into posters and hold a poster forum inviting members of the campus community. Imagine asking each student to investigate an important issue relating to their experiences and then sharing that information with relevant campus offices. In this way, you have deployed your students as researchers and given them a voice in their experience at the same time.

In most cases, your students will be arriving on campus with knowing the language but not how to communicate in it. At Ohio State, we created a communications course for the undergraduate business program which is based on Livermore’s (2012) *Leading with Cultural Intelligence* and includes assignments such as knocking on the door of each of your instructors and introducing yourself, ordering a business card, creating a professional LinkedIn page, joining a student organization, etc.  

At Ohio State we have also created a three-week, pre-semester cultural/academic enrichment program with the motto Ready On Day One (RODO). Students are allowed to enter the U.S thirty days before classes start, and do not require an additional I-20 for orientation style enrichment programs, so this is a natural fit. Charging a minimal fee--in the grand scheme of an undergraduate education which will cost Chinese undergraduates over $150,000--this program pays for itself.

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27 For more information on this, please see an article I wrote for Inside Higher Ed: *Dozing Off.* [https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/12/11/american-universities-should-do-more-help-chinese-students-adapt-essay](https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/12/11/american-universities-should-do-more-help-chinese-students-adapt-essay)
Finally, the ESL program, English Department, and Writing Center at every college and university should work together to sensitize faculty about the unavoidable issue of “writing with an accent.” None of the faculty would ever expect a non-native speaker to eventually speak perfect, unaccented English, so why do they expect them to write without an accent? Simple things like omitting articles (or using them where they don’t below) are absolutely un-teachable and it is unreasonable to expect campus ESL programs to teach Chinese undergraduates how to absolutely eliminate article mistakes in their papers. But with the right cooperation, ESL programs and university writing boards can send the message--loud and clear--to faculty members that just as they should not downgrade a student’s participation points because they speak with an accent, they similarly should not downgrade their written assignments. I suspect professors outside of ESL and English departments expect non-native writers to write grammatically perfect papers, and maybe that is our fault for not disabusing them of that notion, but it is important to stress to faculty that it isn’t possible for non-native writers to write like English natives, and the professors are missing the bigger picture--about ideas and meaning--if they are distracted by minor language interference, such as writing with an accent.

V. Conclusion

The truth is that colleges and universities in the United States must do a better job with their increasing base of international/Chinese students or they will risk losing them. Chinese parents are highly networked consumers and they will send their children elsewhere if they start hearing from other parents that your institution isn’t being a good host. Remember, for almost all
of this generation of Chinese undergraduate, they are the only child. That means there are two sets of grandparents and one set of parents--six adults--all focused on seeking every advantage for their child/grandchild.

If your institution has the intention to meet the needs of Chinese undergraduates, you need to be thoughtful, strategic, and intentional in how you do it. There are several tenets that undergird a successful strategy for being a good host to Chinese undergraduates:

1) At every turn, involve domestic students--leaders of domestic student organizations and domestic classmates, creating opportunities for natural, not forced, cultural exchange.

2) Whenever possible, reject the conventional wisdom--providing compartmentalized services to Chinese undergraduates--this prevents unrealistic expectations on your International Affairs office, and allows each campus office to do what it does best,

3) Create a long-term strategic vision with staff who are trained in and knowledgeable about Chinese culture; make sure that there are Chinese staff members; make sure each campus unit has a designated point person who is sensitive to needs and expectations of Chinese undergraduate students.

4) Make sure faculty know they are also expected to create a welcoming environment for Chinese undergraduates on campus; students take cues from the administration and their professors and if the professors are not on board, this will trickle down to the staff and students.

5) If your college/university collects an international undergraduate student surcharge--as OSU and many other schools do--make sure the way these funds are used is transparent and value should be returned dollar-for-dollar to international students.
6) Do little things like making sure hot water is available in campus buildings, especially classrooms. In most buildings the air conditioning is so cold that it makes Chinese undergraduates uncomfortable, and they are not accustomed to drinking cold water. It might surprise you but this is the most commonly referenced culture shock Chinese undergraduates experience--they have been taught for their entire lives to avoid cold water (“it is bad for your health”) and they need hot water the same way domestic undergraduates need cold water.

7) Realize that almost student in the Chinese K-12 system has had every aspect of their life dictated for them by their parents, teachers, or principals. I’ve heard many Chinese students tell me their high school principals forbid them from dating, and I just read an account of a high school principal who levied fines against students who he caught holding hands. This was their reality. Once they arrive on U.S. campuses, they will have more freedom than they’ve ever had in their lives and many of them won’t have the slightest idea how to do anything other than study...it’s all they’ve ever been allowed to do--or expected to do--their entire lives.

8) Send as many faculty/staff/students as possible to China. Only a trip like this can truly help people develop affinity for Chinese students. And in addition to generally developing affinity, imagine how much it would help the director of your campus dining services--and the entire staff--to go to China for a week and learn about the food culture and tastes of Chinese people.
VI. Appendix

A. Books


B. Articles

5) Role of Virtues and Perceived Life Stress in Affecting Psychological Symptoms Among Chinese College Students. Duan, Wenjie; Ho, Samuel M. Y.; Siu, Bowie