

# Hosting Chinese Exchange Teachers



## A Guide for U.S. Host Families

March 2011



National Committee on United  
States-China Relations

## Acknowledgements

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The National Committee on U.S.-China Relations (NCUSCR) uses this guide in operating the U.S.-China Teachers Exchange Program. It also is available online for other interested parties. Please contact the National Committee for permission to cite or quote from the guide.

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## Introduction

**Y**our family is about to embark on an exciting and sometimes challenging year as a host family for the U.S.-China Teachers Exchange Program (TEP). Funded by the Freeman Foundation and administered by the National Committee on United States-China Relations (NCUSCR) in conjunction with the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), the TEP addresses these three goals:

- ❁ enriching teacher and student understanding of the other country and culture;
- ❁ introducing or strengthening Chinese studies in U.S. schools; and
- ❁ helping to improve English language instruction in participating Chinese secondary schools.

As a host family, you may have many questions about how you can contribute to these goals while managing the various day-to-day issues of hosting a Chinese teacher in your home for a year. The purpose of this guide is to address these issues and, in so doing, enhance the exchange experience both for your family and for the Chinese exchange teacher.

Throughout this exciting and challenging experience, remember that you are not alone! Resources within the school and community, as well as at the National Committee, are available to assist you. There should be at least one contact person in the school or district who will work with you as a liaison to coordinate the teacher's school and community life. Work closely with this community liaison to share the many responsibilities associated with hosting a Chinese teacher. There also may be former or current host families in your community who can offer tips on how to maximize the hosting experience. Additional resources, such as sister city organizations, might be available locally as well.

In this guide, you will find information about the logistics of setting up and managing the home environment as well as suggestions for helping the visiting teacher adjust to American culture. The guide covers advance planning, arrangements for the teacher's arrival and settling in period, and exploring beyond the immediate school and family environments. Although the guide offers comprehensive advice, it cannot anticipate every development over the course of a year. Please do not hesitate to contact the National Committee as questions arise. (Contact information for the National Committee and other resources is provided in Appendix A.)

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The guide is based on the experiences and suggestions of participating Chinese teachers, American teachers, host families, administrators, and program staff. This information has been gathered through interviews, surveys, and workshops. We hope that you will read this guide before the Chinese teacher arrives and consult it throughout your year(s) of hosting an exchange teacher(s).

# Setting Up the Home Environment

**T**he Chinese teachers typically arrive about one week before school begins so they can begin to adapt to their surroundings before they teach. There are several things you can do prior to the teacher's arrival to ease the early days of his/her stay in your home.

## Prior to Arrival

- \* Request the name of a contact person at the host school, such as a community logistics liaison, who will be able to assist you if challenges arise.
- \* Ask the school for the name(s) of previous host families who can provide information, advice, and support.
- \* Get in touch with the teacher via e-mail (address available from the National Committee) before he/she leaves for the United States. Introduce yourself and the other members of your family via e-mail and let the Chinese teacher know that he/she will be a welcome guest in your home.
- \* Arrange a private bedroom in your home for the teacher.
- \* Discuss and develop house rules with all family members related to the teacher's presence in your home. Address the overall nature of the guest/family relationship, including such areas as meals, laundry, privacy, rent, and the use of the computer, television, DVD player, and other such equipment. Read through this guide for helpful suggestions related to these topics. Once you have achieved a family consensus about the rules, write them up.
- \* Make a copy of your house key for the Chinese teacher's use.
- \* Prepare a card with family contact and emergency numbers for the teacher to carry.
- \* Obtain a map of your city and maps of bus, subway, or other transportation routes.
- \* If appropriate to your location, find a bicycle that the Chinese teacher can use while he/she is staying with you.
- \* Prepare a welcome basket. Consider including fresh fruit, loose tea, an international phone card, written house rules, your house key, a local map, and a card for the teacher to carry that lists family contact and emergency numbers. (In the sections below, we will talk about some of these items in more detail.)

- ❁ Reflect on the many ways in which life in your community and home can be confusing to someone from a very different culture. Consider what additional steps you can take to ease the teacher's transition to your specific home and community.
- ❁ With the school liaison, plan a dinner or reception to welcome the Chinese exchange teacher soon after the teacher's arrival. Guests in China receive lavish welcomes, and your Chinese guest will expect the same. An event is not only a nice way to acknowledge this custom, but also provides a way of immediately expanding the teacher's potential support network.

## Airport Arrival

Coordinate plans with the school contact person for meeting the teacher at the airport. The teacher should be met by one or more members of your family and by at least one person from the school. In the Chinese context, this is standard procedure in greeting a newcomer. Flowers to welcome the teacher are a nice touch. Remember that the exchange teacher is your guest and will expect to be treated as a guest, particularly at the beginning.

This may be the exchange teacher's first time away from China. He or she will probably be anxious and exhausted, and perhaps airsick, upon arrival. Expect the exchange teacher to bring two of the largest and heaviest suitcases you have ever seen.

China is across the International Date Line. Depending on your time zone, there is a 12-15 hour time difference. It may take several days or longer for the Chinese teacher to recover from the trip. Because long flights are very dehydrating, encourage the teacher to consume plenty of fluids (fruit juice at room temperature, warm water, or hot tea). Plan on a few quiet days after arrival to give the Chinese teacher time to adjust to your home, family, and community. Activities such as excursions to the grocery store, introductions to local school people, and taking care of the immediate tasks outlined in the next section would be appropriate.

## Shortly after Arrival

Certain tasks need to be taken care of in the first few days after the exchange teacher arrives. Matters involving communication with families in China, Social Security, identification, finances, and transportation should be foremost in the minds of the host family and their guest. Allow for jet lag, however, as you go about these errands.



### Shortly after arrival,

assist your guest in:

- ❖ placing a call home;
- ❖ obtaining Social Security and state identification cards;
- ❖ opening a bank account;
- ❖ learning the local transportation system; and
- ❖ becoming familiar with your neighborhood and local area.

### Calling Home

- ❁ As soon as your guest arrives, show him/her how to use the telephone to call home. The teacher will want to hear his/her family's voice and the family will want to know that the teacher has arrived safely. Telephones (land lines and cell phones) are commonplace in urban China, but the teacher will need instruction on how to make local and long distance calls. Understanding when to use a "1" and/or an area code can be confusing.
- ❁ Help the teacher obtain an international phone card and demonstrate its use. Consider giving a welcome gift of an international phone card with 60-120 minutes of call time. This will give the exchange teacher some peace of mind and a bit of time before he/she has to figure out how to purchase one alone. Although the teachers learn about some options at the orientation program and may have information provided by former exchange teachers, rates, availability, and access fees vary dramatically across the United States.

### Social Security and Identification Cards

- ❁ File for a Social Security number as soon as possible. Check the Social Security Administration website ([www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)) or local telephone book for the nearest office and for current information on obtaining a Social Security card. Be aware that Social Security regulations may change. The teacher must present his/her passport, I-94 card, DS-2019 form, and the original letter of invitation to the United States. In the past, it has taken two or three weeks to process applications but in some areas it can take a month or more. It might take longer now because the Department of Homeland Security must approve applications from foreigners.
- ❁ Help the exchange teacher obtain an official form of identification. Ideally, the teacher should apply for a non-driver's license ID card from the state Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Application requirements vary from state to state. Check with the local DMV office for details. (Most Chinese do not have driver's licenses—driving is a profession in China—and the teachers should not be encouraged to learn to drive. Driving is dangerous; cars, gas, and insurance are costly.)
- ❁ Explain to the exchange teacher that he or she should store, and NOT carry around, his/her passport. The teacher should keep it in a safe but convenient place that will protect it against loss or theft. A copy of the passport face page and U.S. visa should be kept in a safe place separate from the passport. If a replacement passport is needed, having copies on hand will expedite the process.

### Financial Matters and Insurance

#### Bank Accounts

- ❁ Help the exchange teacher open a bank account as soon as possible. Security provisions implemented since September 11, 2001, require banks to ask for Social Security numbers when submitting an application to open an account. Enforcement is quite variable. If the teacher must wait for a Social Security number, it may be several weeks before an account may be established and another few days before the stipend check from the National Committee will clear. The teachers all come with some American money. They may need to break \$100 bills.
- ❁ Explain how to use personal checking accounts and ATMs. Personal checking accounts are virtually non-existent in China so explain how they work and how to write a check. ATMs

are prevalent in urban China, but English-language prompts will be unfamiliar. Please be sure that the teacher can figure out how to get cash. Many American ATM cards can be used as debit cards. Please explain how they work. Credit cards are fairly uncommon in China, and may be difficult for the Chinese teacher to obtain here because they have no credit history in the United States. This varies widely from place to place and from credit card company to credit card company.

### *Taxes*

Even though the Chinese teacher will not owe American taxes due to provisions of the U.S.-China Tax Treaty, they must file a myriad of forms in the spring that will require a Social Security number. The National Committee will send the forms and detailed instructions to the exchange teachers.

### *Rent*

Rent paid to host families varies according to location. Depending on the cost of living, the amount will range from \$300-\$500 per month. Teachers are told that they will pay up to \$500/month for their food and lodging. The funds should cover the cost of food (breakfast and dinner during the week and three meals each weekend day); use of the facilities (such as the washer/dryer, kitchen, local telephone), and a reasonable share of the cost of utilities. Depending on the local cost of living, it is acceptable to ask the teacher to pay less than \$500, but no less than \$300/month. Host families should not expect to make a profit, but it is advisable to determine an amount and stick to it rather than trying to negotiate after the exchange teacher arrives. The Chinese teacher will have no idea of costs here, and everything will seem quite expensive by Chinese standards.

Be aware that the first payment of rent may be late. The teacher will probably not have enough cash on hand to cover rent immediately.

Money is generally not a taboo subject in China. It is common to ask how much things cost and to inquire about salaries. You may not feel comfortable discussing these matters in detail with your visitor, but it would be instructive for the teacher to know the percentage of your income that you spend on mortgage payments or rent, income tax, property tax, etc. Chinese guests will not only be astonished by these percentages, but also will be able to put their own rent in the proper perspective. It also can be beneficial to explain that the range of income for families in the U.S. varies considerably. Similarly it is important to keep in mind that the priorities of each exchange teacher may be unique and this may influence their decisions on what activities they do and do not engage in while in the U.S. They all have funds sufficient for them to engage in a wide range of social activities, even if there is a charge, and/or to travel, during their stay in the United States.

### *Health Care and Medical Insurance*

When they come to the United States, most of the teachers are relatively young and healthy. They may, however, fall ill with minor ailments. In this case, some may be reluctant to visit a Western doctor, fearing communication difficulties and/or the cost of American medicine. Most teachers bring with them a supply of traditional Chinese medicine. If you think that the teacher is seriously ill or that the Chinese medicines are not having the desired effect, you may have to insist on a visit to the doctor.

The teacher has health insurance coverage provided by the National Committee. He/she may see any doctor. The policy covers 80% of "reasonable and customary" charges. There is no dental or eye coverage unless teeth or eyes are damaged in a covered illness or accident. Also,

pre-existing conditions are not covered. The teacher has a copy of the policy and you should ask to read it if you wish. Remind the teacher to carry the insurance ID card at all times.

### Transportation

Some communities have extensive public transportation systems, while others have little or no public transportation. Whatever the situation, the Chinese teacher will need to get to and from school as well as to supermarkets, malls, post offices, libraries, and other places of interest. Consider the location of your home and the transportation situation in your community as you assist the teacher in making appropriate transportation arrangements.

- ✿ If you live in an area with public transportation, provide a detailed street map and maps of subway and/or bus routes. Introduce the public transportation system by using public transit on trial runs to the teacher's school and to shopping centers and other necessary locations.
- ✿ If there is little or no public transportation in your area, make sure the teacher has a reliable means of getting to and from school each day. If you live within walking distance of the school, help the exchange teacher find a walking route to the school. In some cases, the teacher might take the school bus to and/or from school. If a teacher from the exchange teacher's school lives nearby, check to see if he or she could give the Chinese teacher a ride.
- ✿ Work closely with a contact person at your host school to arrange transportation options. Ask for a list of people who are willing to help with driving. Having a number of people share the transportation tasks will relieve you from having to do all of the driving and also expand the teacher's options for exploring American life.
- ✿ If a bicycle is a good means of transportation in your area and you can provide a bicycle and helmet, check with the Chinese teacher to find out whether he or she would like to ride a bicycle to school. Some teachers may not know how to ride a bike and/or may not feel comfortable riding here because of unfamiliar traffic patterns. If a teacher prefers not to ride a bike, please don't push him/her to do so. If the Chinese teacher is interested in bicycling, urge the teacher to wear a helmet. This is not done in China, but it is important here because of the large number of motorized vehicles on the roads.
- ✿ Make plans for those occasions when the Chinese teacher may need additional help with transportation. Despite the availability of public transportation and a bicycle, there may be times when someone from your family will be called upon for transportation. Let the Chinese teacher know how much notice you require to make these arrangements.
- ✿ Explain how to telephone for a cab in your area. In Chinese cities, taxis cruise and are easily hailed on the street, but this may not be the case in your area.
- ✿ Make sure that the teacher knows how to reach you in case of a transportation (or other) emergency. A laminated card with home, office, and cell phone numbers and the home address would be very handy for the teacher.

### Welcoming Activities

Make your guest feel welcome in your home and community. The following are some activities that will introduce the Chinese teacher to your community and help him/her become familiar with your neighborhood.

- ❁ Check with the school liaison about a welcome dinner for the teacher. The custom in China is to welcome guests with a banquet very soon after arrival. Consider a local Chinese restaurant since this food will be relatively familiar and may help to settle a stomach that is queasy from unfamiliar food and water. If you know someone who speaks Mandarin Chinese, it would be wise to inform him/her of the exchange teacher's arrival in advance. This person could be included in early welcoming activities and could be an invaluable asset in facilitating communication and making the teacher feel comfortable.
- ❁ Walk with the teacher around streets in your neighborhood and local area, and introduce him/her to local shopping options for food and other necessities. If there is a Chinese or Asian market, be sure to point it out.
- ❁ Ask someone from China who has lived in the United States to help introduce the teacher to American-style shopping. The teacher might not recognize foods we find common and may need help in discovering which items to substitute for those typically found in China. When considering someone to do this, remember that there might be sensitivities about Taiwan. If possible, find somebody from the Mainland.
- ❁ If appropriate, alert the local newspaper and/or television station to the exchange program and encourage them to interview the exchange teacher. Schedule interviews a few weeks after school has started so that the teacher can talk about initial impressions of American school life. (Check with the school to determine whether you or someone from the school should contact the media.)

## Managing the Home Environment

### General House Rules and Procedures

Your home will differ in some significant ways from a typical Chinese home. Many things, from eating meals to using the bathroom, may be puzzling to your Chinese guest. Demonstrate, in addition to explaining, how to use the facilities and equipment in your home. Also, give your guest written guidelines to life around your home in case something is missed in the initial whirlwind of introductions to the household. Let him/her know that you welcome questions, but be aware that he/she may still feel uncomfortable asking for help. Try to be sensitive to this insecurity by responding to body language and facial expressions in addition to direct verbal requests. The following tips can help you and your guest live together in harmony.

- ❁ Expect that your guest may comment on how enormous your home seems compared to the relatively small, urban apartments in China. The sheer size of your home coupled with the fact that few Chinese have

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experienced living or even staying alone may cause the teacher to be apprehensive about being alone in the house, especially soon after arrival and at night.

- ✿ Though the Chinese are not accustomed to staying alone, they do still need their privacy. It is common for some teachers to spend time alone in their room in the evenings and on the weekends. This preference should be understood in its cultural context and not be interpreted as a sign of unfriendliness. The teacher may feel overwhelmed by constant exposure to a different culture or by his/her workload. He or she may simply need time alone to process this experience or contact family back in China. Do engage in regular conversations with the teacher, particularly in the first month or so. In order to address concerns before they become major issues, ask explicitly about how things are going and whether anything is making him/her uncomfortable.
- ✿ Show your guest how to use the house key you have provided.
- ✿ Post contact numbers for family members, the Chinese teacher, and emergency services in a prominent location so that you know how to reach your guest and he/she knows how to reach you.
- ✿ Have a set place for exchanging messages and mail.
- ✿ Post a general schedule of the normal daily/weekly routine with information about the comings and goings of various members of the house. Consider using a calendar with enough room for each person to note special events or appointments in different colors.
- ✿ Make it clear if you wish to know when the teacher will be home. Your guest is an adult and should feel free to come and go as he/she pleases. But some responsibilities go along with living with others. Your guest's presence may affect your meal times or other important routines, so let him/her know how and when to notify you. The teacher should not feel obligated to account to you for every moment, but it is acceptable to insist that your guest tell you when he/she will be home in the evening.
- ✿ Post appropriate times for computer and phone usage.
- ✿ Explain that we sleep between the sheets. Often the Chinese make beds without a top sheet, using only a bottom sheet and a comforter.
- ✿ Tell the teacher to put toilet paper into the toilet and flush it. Also explain what women should do with sanitary products. The Chinese often have a basket next to the toilet for both.
- ✿ Demonstrate how the shower works.
- ✿ Demonstrate how the washing machine and dryer work. Some teachers prefer to wash their clothing by hand. If possible, provide a line or drying rack to hang clothing. Teachers willing to use a washing machine may wish to wash their clothing separately (not mix their laundry with the host family's clothing). This should be understood as a cultural preference and not taken as an insult.
- ✿ If water is scarce in your area, explain that and describe water conservation measures (such as full loads of laundry, quick showers, etc.). Northern China is exceedingly dry, so the concept will be familiar, but the teachers may not realize that water scarcity may be an issue here, too.

- ❁ If your home has a security system, explain how it works and what should be done if the teacher accidentally sets it off when no one else is at home.
- ❁ Chinese exchange teachers probably are unfamiliar with smoke detectors. Explain why you have them, how they operate, and what to do if cooking smoke causes the alarm to sound.

## Helping in the Home

The exchange teacher is your guest, but he/she will also appreciate being treated as part of the family. Encourage him/her to pitch in and help along with the rest of the family. The teacher is not a maid or babysitter, but it is appropriate to ask for help with some household tasks. Contributing to household chores will help the teacher learn more about the day-to-day routines of American life. The following are some suggested tasks and activities to involve your visitor in your family life:

- ❁ Setting or clearing the table. Because silverware is not commonly used in China, you should explain its placement.
- ❁ Washing, chopping, or cooking food with other family members. This is a good opportunity for conversation, sharing American practices, and learning Chinese techniques.
- ❁ Cleaning the dishes. Some Chinese homes have sterilizers, but the dishwasher is not common so you will need to demonstrate how to use it.
- ❁ Accompanying a family member on grocery shopping expeditions.
- ❁ Sweeping or vacuuming. The Chinese teacher may be unfamiliar with the use of a vacuum cleaner. Demonstrate its use.
- ❁ Taking out the garbage. Explain local rules about trash, including recycling, landfills, and trash pick-up.
- ❁ Cleaning. The teacher should be responsible for cleaning his/her own private room and/or bath area. If you have a cleaning service that comes into your home, please be aware that the teacher may prefer to take care of his/her own space as a matter of privacy.

## Using the Telephone

- ❁ Prominently display a list of important phone numbers, including “911.” Explain how to call for emergency assistance and directory information. Also, make sure that the teacher knows how to reach you during the day in case of an emergency.
- ❁ Provide ground rules for when it is appropriate to make and receive calls. The time difference between the United States and China means that some calls from China may come in very early in the morning or late in the evening. The Chinese also have different conventions in

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making calls — thinking nothing of calling quite late at night or early in the morning. We generally tell the teachers that they should not make or receive calls after 10 p.m. or on weekend mornings before 10 a.m., except in emergencies. If you have a different rule of thumb for when you prefer to have calls come in, please tell your guest at the outset.

- ❁ Explain how your answering machine works. These devices are not common in China, so you should warn the teacher of any clicks, beeps, or voices that might be heard if the machine picks up while he/she is home alone and does not answer the phone.
- ❁ Write your name, address and telephone number on a card for your guest to carry when he/she goes out. Explain how he/she can reach you if he/she gets lost or is running late. Having a cell phone makes this easier but not all teachers will have one. Help them to acquire one if possible. Make sure that the teacher knows how to use a public telephone on the street or has another means of reaching you. If he/she gets lost or is running late, making a call from a pay phone may be necessary.
- ❁ Explain how the phone book is organized into sections and show your guest how to look up numbers. Explain that names are organized alphabetically by surname and then personal name.

## Using Technology

The use of the computer and television will be important to the Chinese exchange teacher. He/she will rely on technology not only to stay in touch with friends and family in China, but also to accomplish daily tasks for the teaching assignment. Although these devices are common in China, your guest may be unfamiliar with their use in the United States.

- ❁ Show the teacher how to use any audio-visual equipment that will be available for their use in your home. This may include the television, remote control, VCR, DVD, and CD players.
- ❁ Many teachers bring their laptops or have them provided by the host school. If this is the case, they may still need assistance connecting to the Internet in your home. Adapting to technology use in the U.S. may pose some problems initially. Chinese computers may require adaptors usable in the U.S. and teachers should have these adaptors with them or be helped to buy one at a local hardware store. If necessary, enlist the help of a technologically savvy friend or neighbor to work out any computer issues as your Chinese guest will rely heavily on technology both to keep in touch with family and prepare for his or her daily teaching assignment.
- ❁ Access to email is vital. For ongoing contact with their families in China some teachers may prefer using email rather than the telephone as it may be a more cost effective and convenient mode of communication. Teachers may have a webcam on their computer. If not, consider offering assistance in acquiring one.
- ❁ If you have a computer at home that the exchange visitor may use, demonstrate how it works. Familiarity with computers varies widely. If it seems appropriate, suggest that the exchange teacher take free computer classes at a local library or elsewhere.
- ❁ Explain the household rules that apply to computer use, including rules for sharing time on the computer, time limitations, available software, Internet safety, e-mail, and the cost implications of time online. If your guest uses the Internet, he/she may be working with

Chinese language materials. The resulting temporary files may be huge, so it may be wise to set the computer to delete these files on a regular basis. If you do so, tell the teacher so that wanted files don't disappear unexpectedly.

- ✿ If the teacher has a digital camera, ask whether he/she wants to send and receive photographs via computer. If your home computer is available for this use, demonstrate how the teacher can use it to send and receive photographs. If not, encourage the teacher to talk with technical people at school about using a computer at the school for this purpose.
- ✿ Show the teacher how to access current news from China on the Internet. Make him/her aware of any Chinese-language cable television channels that may be available in your area. News is also available through the *People's Daily*. The nearest Chinese Consulate will send this to all Chinese nationals at no cost.
- ✿ Accompany the teacher to the public library where he/she will have access to news on the Internet and in periodicals. Some libraries have collections of Chinese films on DVD. Your guest may be interested in borrowing them.

**L**et your guest know that you welcome questions and that you hope you are not offending him/her by asking your own. Differences are exciting and interesting and a good way to come to know each other's cultures on the path to becoming friends.

## Ongoing Assistance with Living in America

**I**t is normal when first living in a strange home and country to feel culture shock. The different language, foods, and ways that people interact are exciting, but often make one feel at a loss about how to fit in. Everything may appear to be fine, but there may be confusion or homesickness beneath the surface. Remember that the exchange teacher has left a spouse and probably a child back in China. Try to understand how confusing life here can be for people from a very different culture and imagine what it would be like to be separated from your family for a whole year. In time, this valuable but disorienting cross-cultural experience gives a person new perspectives to understand both cultures more clearly.

Differences are exciting and interesting. Discussing them is a good way to come to know each other's cultures on the path to becoming friends. Let your guest know that you welcome questions and you hope you are not offending them by asking your own. Loss of face is a serious issue to the Chinese. Your guest may feel embarrassed or diminished in your eyes by not understanding what is happening or by doing something that startles you but is normal and reassuring for them. It may be helpful to take responsibility yourself for a misunderstanding, even if you do not feel at fault.

Homesickness at various times is normal. Because exchange visitors may fear that expressing sadness or loneliness will disappoint you or hurt your feelings, it is also important to reassure them that you sympathize or empathize with their feelings. Although the Chinese teacher may feel homesick at various times, he/she is most likely to experience homesickness around Chinese holidays and at the beginning and end of the exchange year. Encourage your guest to talk about his/her thoughts and feelings with you. If there are other exchange teachers in the area, gather them together to help the visitor through the down times. A local Chinese (not Chinese-American or Taiwanese) undergraduate or graduate student group might be a helpful resource.

Remember that the norm in China is one child per family. The dynamics of American multi-child, extended, blended, adopted families are baffling to many foreigners. Explain relationships and expect questions as your guest becomes comfortable with your family. Encourage the sharing of pictures and stories of home and family. You may use family albums to clarify relationships within your own family. The Chinese love pictures of their own children and will enjoy showing them to you. Sharing photographs is a good way both to teach about your American family and to learn about your guest's family back home in China. Showing interest in your guest's family may also help to alleviate homesickness.

In the following sections, we provide information and tips on various topics to help you ease your guest's adjustment to living in America.

## Communicating

- ❁ Be aware that, at the beginning, your guest may try to understand what he/she hears by silently translating the English words into Chinese. The teacher may then formulate a response in Chinese, translate it into English, and then say it. This process is not only time consuming but also exhausting. If it is clear that something is not getting across, try to say the same thing using different words. Enunciate!
- ❁ You may find the exchange teacher's knowledge of English to be "bookish." It is likely that he or she has practiced speaking English only with other native Chinese speakers and does not, therefore, have command of colloquial language, common usage, and slang. Even if teachers nod and say they understand be sensitive to facial expressions and behaviors that might indicate otherwise.
- ❁ Remember that the exchange teacher's written comprehension may exceed his/her aural comprehension. Spoken English varies widely around the world and across the United States. The conversational English with which your guest is familiar may be very different from what is encountered in your home, school, and community. Writing down a word or phrase might facilitate an especially difficult oral exchange.
- ❁ Be aware that it may be embarrassing for the exchange teacher to admit that something is not understood. A nod or a smile does not necessarily indicate comprehension.
- ❁ Stop frequently, especially in the beginning, to ask if the teacher has any questions or concerns about what he/she is hearing.
- ❁ Discuss American idioms and slang terms that the Chinese teacher may find puzzling. Discussing these expressions is a good way to clarify immediate communication and develop cultural insight.

- ✿ Recognize that humor does not always translate well. Something you find extremely funny may be puzzling to your guest and vice versa.
- ✿ Clarify allusions to current sports teams, political events, books, and movies, etc.

## Names

There are big differences between the naming conventions and modes of address in American and Chinese culture. The Chinese surname comes first; the personal name, either one or two characters, follows. For example, in the name “Mao Tse-tung,” “Mao” is the surname and “Tse-tung” the personal name.

- ✿ Find out if your guest prefers to be called by a surname, full name, or English name. In China, most people are addressed by the surname alone or by the full name. It is a sign of considerable intimacy to use the personal name only. Some Chinese will adopt the Western style and ask to be called by their personal name, but others will be very uncomfortable with American informality.
- ✿ Be aware that Chinese society is very hierarchical, and titles are important. A school principal is always addressed and referred to as “Principal Wang” — never as Wang, Mr. /Mrs. Wang, full name, or personal name only. It may strike the exchange teacher as uncomfortably informal if a principal or other professional chooses to be called by a personal name.
- ✿ If you would like your guest to call you and your friends by your first names, introduce them that way: “This is John Doe. Please call him John.” Do not include a title, such as Mrs. or Dr., if the person does not wish to be consistently addressed in that way.

## Food and Cooking

Many Chinese visitors miss Chinese food. Many American foods will have different smells and flavors from those to which your Chinese visitor is accustomed. Your guest will appreciate having boiled rice or noodles and Chinese food, especially in the beginning. Fresh fruit is always appreciated. Despite these challenges, make it a point to eat together whenever you can. Daily meal times are a valuable opportunity for fostering discussion and sharing family and cultural traditions. The following are other suggestions that may ease meal time for your guest:

- ✿ Make chopsticks available to your guest. If necessary, demonstrate how to use a knife and fork to cut cooked food. Chinese dishes contain small pieces of food that can be picked up easily with chopsticks so your guest may not know how to manage a steak. Finger foods may also be unknown, so you may need to demonstrate how to eat something that is meant to be eaten with the hands.
- ✿ When offered food or drink, Chinese etiquette demands a “no” because the guest is not supposed to trouble the host. Although we tell the exchange teachers that in American culture “no” (or, “no, thank you”) means “no,” many find it difficult, especially at the beginning, to say “yes” to something the first time it is offered. It is best to ask several times, or to go ahead and serve the person, unless he/she has declined the offer three times. Three “no’s” mean “no”! After a certain point, it is possible to ask if the “no” is a Chinese no or an American no. If the latter, then the person really does not want to eat or drink.

**I**f your family is amenable, invite the teacher to cook on a regular basis. Once a week, for example, the Chinese teacher could eat familiar food and the host family could be treated to authentic Chinese cuisine.

- ✿ Use meal times as “teachable moments” to show your visitor appropriate American table manners. Table manners in the U.S. and China differ considerably. The Chinese have different customs that apply to unwanted food and these may make you uncomfortable. For example, some Chinese tend to spit bones out on the table. Some might take foods they don’t want or like from their plates and put it on yours so that it is not wasted. Show and explain what is acceptable in your home. For example, place bones on the side of the plate or indicate that you do not place disliked food onto another person’s plate.
- ✿ Be aware that, in general, Chinese like to drink hot beverages, including hot water, hot milk, and soup. They may believe that drinking cold beverages or soup will give them a stomach ache. Tea, preferably loose (not in tea bags), is a must. Fruit juice is generally appreciated. Coke and Sprite will be familiar. Most exchange teachers have little interest in alcohol, though they might enjoy beer with dinner or at celebrations.
- ✿ Consider reserving cooking broths and offering them to your guest either as a first or last course. With meals, the Chinese generally do not consume beverages other than soup.
- ✿ Expect your visitor to be surprised or even disgusted by certain foods in the American diet. For example, because they avoid raw foods in China, they may view salad with suspicion. You might recommend that the visitor taste everything, but if something is obviously causing distress, don’t push. After all, there are Chinese delicacies that might give you pause — and that you wouldn’t want to be forced to eat (e.g., pig’s ears, sea slugs, scorpions).
- ✿ Avoid serving the Chinese teacher dairy products, most notably cheese. Dairy products are not part of the Chinese diet and most will find the taste and smell of cheese unpleasant. (Notable exceptions are yogurt, ice cream, and mozzarella cheese on pizza.)
- ✿ Expect that most Chinese will prefer meat that is well done. Generally, they prefer spicy to bland and salty to sweet. Consider cooking meat in a crockpot or one-pot meal. These methods usually yield well-done, tender, bite-sized pieces that will appeal to the Chinese palate.
- ✿ Regularly invite or expect the Chinese teacher to go on grocery shopping trips with you. He/she will become part of the family routine, learn more about the American diet, and be able to find more familiar foods. Also try to find an Asian market in your area where the teacher can find familiar foods.
- ✿ If your family is amenable, invite the Chinese teacher to cook meals on a regular basis. Once a week, for example, the Chinese teacher could eat familiar food and the host family could be treated to authentic Chinese cuisine. If you want to learn how to make various Chinese dishes, help your guest prepare the meals. Let the teacher know if something is overwhelming to the American palate.

- ✿ If you have an electric stove, demonstrate how to use it (Chinese stoves run on gas). Also demonstrate how to use an oven because ovens, too, will be unfamiliar. Some teachers will be familiar with microwaves, but others will need instruction about their operation and the use of microwave-safe containers.
- ✿ Explain your family's routines for meals and snacks. Let your guest know what may be consumed without asking.
- ✿ Explain clean-up procedures. Do you wash dishes immediately after a meal, or is it acceptable to wait a while? If the teacher has something to drink in the evening, for example, should the glass/cup/mug be washed immediately or do you let dishes accumulate in the sink and then do them all at once?

## Prejudice and Politics

To most Chinese, the typical American is someone of European ancestry. Non-white Americans may not seem like "real Americans" to your Chinese guest. In China, there is much ignorance about and prejudice towards Africans and people of African descent. Many Chinese are afraid of dark-skinned people and will not hesitate to make disparaging comments that may be offensive to Americans. You may want to discuss fears of blacks and other misperceptions with your guest, especially if you live in a part of the country with a large African-American population.

Be sensitive to topics that might offend the Chinese teachers and be aware that teachers vary in their sensitivity to issues. Follow the lead of your guest on any discussion of sensitive subjects, especially those related to Chinese political issues. What may strike you as an intellectually interesting topic might be a tough political matter for your guest. Taiwan, Tibet and religious activities are areas that have been pointed out by participating schools as potentially touchy issues. The teacher may be surprised by the wide variety of media perspectives on these issues that are not available to them in China. If your guest seems uncomfortable or tries to change the subject, don't push. The teacher has to feel comfortable with you before he/she may be willing to discuss sensitive topics.

## Sexuality and Relationships

Visiting teachers from China are uniformly surprised by the open sexuality of American high school students. Chinese students are not allowed to date openly. The contrast to American students is profound.

Chinese are demonstrative with members of the same sex. It is common to see two boys or two girls holding hands. Adult women, and sometimes men, may also walk arm in arm. No one in China would assume that these are homosexual couples. Homosexuality is generally "in the closet" in China. It will therefore probably be surprising to visiting teachers to see gay/straight clubs at schools and/or to encounter openly gay colleagues.

Chinese adults are generally quite reserved publicly with members of the opposite sex. The usual greeting, even among relatives and good friends, is a handshake. Spouses do not often hug or kiss in public. It may therefore be disconcerting for your guest if you and your spouse part in the morning with a hug or kiss. If you are unmarried and bring a member of the opposite sex home for the night, your Chinese guest may be acutely uncomfortable. Although you

do not need to change these behaviors, be aware of how it may affect your guest due to the different mores in the two cultures.

## School Practices

School practices in American and Chinese schools differ. It may be useful for you to explain typical American practices to your guest, but it is not necessary or advisable for you to intervene with the school on behalf of the teacher. Some areas of difference that frequently arise relate to the teacher's workload, priorities of American students, classroom management, and the teacher's relationship with the principal.

## Workload

Chinese teachers generally teach two periods daily. They often prepare their lessons in groups and spend enormous amounts of time correcting exercises although the workload may vary from school to school. In their American schools, they often are asked to teach three or more classes. It will take some time for them to adjust to this workload.

American teachers are accustomed to having other duties in the school such as lunch duty, hall monitoring, and bus duty. There are no such duties in Chinese schools so your guest will be unfamiliar with them. Some Chinese teachers have found such duties demeaning. It might be helpful to explain why American teachers perform these duties and why it might be appropriate for the Chinese teacher to contribute in these areas.

## Student Priorities

In China, Chinese teachers in the exchange program generally work with highly motivated students at "key" schools. These schools attract students whose families expect them to pass an extremely competitive national college entrance examination. The students do little but study. The priorities of American students, even highly motivated students, may strike Chinese teachers as very strange. Such things as students having part-time jobs, internships, boy-friends/girlfriends, and responsibility for younger siblings, or students living on their own independent from their families are all completely unknown to Chinese secondary students. A handful of Chinese schools have school-sponsored extra-curricular activities but the emphasis of many American schools on activities such as sports, school performances, clubs, and debate teams will be utterly foreign. It might be helpful to explain why many Americans think that academics are not the only purpose of school.

## Classroom Management

Classroom management issues that are familiar to American teachers will be startling to your guest. The teacher may feel like a failure at the beginning of the school year because of difficulties in controlling the students. Encouragement is crucial. It may be helpful for you to talk about what the teacher is experiencing. If a member of your family is a teacher, it would be extremely helpful for this person to share some classroom management tips with the Chinese teacher.

## Relationship with the Principal

A school, factory, or enterprise in China is known as a work unit (*danwei*). In Mao's time, the work unit took care of everything for everyone associated with it, including housing, school-

ing, child care, elder care, health insurance, and other services. The exchange teacher may expect the principal of his/her American school to be concerned about issues such as these – issues that you might consider a personal matter. For example, if an issue develops between you and your guest, the teacher may turn to the principal for advice. Although you may see housing matters as separate from the school, the Chinese may expect to turn to the work unit for assistance – and, from the Chinese perspective, it would be perfectly understandable.

Chinese society and the work units are quite hierarchical. Your guest may be fearful of the principal when it comes to discussions of the teacher's work or students. If there is an issue with a student that the principal wishes to discuss with the teacher, the teacher may feel that he/she is being criticized. From the principal's perspective, he/she may simply be seeking information. It might be helpful if you can explain relationships between teachers and principals in your school.

## Exploring Beyond the Home and School

**T**he host family has the opportunity to show American life to the Chinese exchange teacher. Encourage teachers and others in the local community to invite the teacher to social activities, particularly at the beginning of the year. Chinese are not accustomed to solitude and will want a community of people with whom to interact and do things. Invitations to lunch, coffee/tea, and dinner will be hugely appreciated. Given the importance of family to Chinese culture, the teacher will value meeting members of your family. Although the activities might seem very ordinary to you, the invitations will make the teacher feel welcomed and cared for, and will save him/her from a potentially lonely weekend.

### Volunteering

Some teachers may be asked to tutor students outside of the school day. Teachers are free to do so if they have the time and inclination. However, because of their visa status, they may not accept payment for tutoring. In lieu of cash, a gift would be acceptable – for example, a digital camera or some other technical gizmo.

Some teachers have volunteered at community organizations. Activities have varied widely, ranging from tutoring immigrants in spoken English to teaching computer skills to working in a soup kitchen. If during the course of the year a host family member is involved in some sort of charitable fundraising effort such as an AIDS Walk, invite the exchange teacher to join

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you. He/she may not raise much money, but this is American volunteerism in action. Similarly, if there is a marathon in your area, recommend that the teacher watch. Some have been especially moved by the wheelchair athletes.

## Social Invitations

The Chinese generally respond to invitations differently than Americans. Invitations to do things are not usually turned down, whereas invitations to eat or drink—"would you like something to drink?"—often are. In China, when an invitation is extended, the expectation is that the person making the invitation will pay for the activity, whether it is an entrance fee, the cost of a meal, or something else. Although the teachers know that American customs differ, they may not always remember to carry enough cash to cover all costs, especially at the beginning when prices are unfamiliar. If you do choose to pay, the teacher may wish to thank you for your hospitality by preparing a lavish meal for you or by taking you out for a meal at a local Chinese restaurant. It is entirely appropriate for you to accept.

If you do not wish to cover the cost for the teacher, tell him/her ahead of time how much money he/she should expect to spend. There is a tendency among the visitors to save money to take back home, so please try to understand if your guest would rather stay home reading a book than spend money on theatre tickets.

Do not feel that you and your family are solely responsible for your guest's social life. Consider these ways for involving the teacher with others:

- ❁ Consider hosting one or more small or large dinner parties at your home during the year. These gatherings will help introduce your guest to American customs and broaden his or her social network.
- ❁ Recruit friends to invite the Chinese teacher on sightseeing trips, family outings, holiday activities, and community events. Besides helping the Chinese teacher meet a variety of people, it will also spread the responsibility for activities across a wider group of people.
- ❁ Stay in touch with the contact person in the school who will be able to help the Chinese teacher build relationships within the school community.
- ❁ Try to include non-teachers when you plan an outing with the exchange teacher(s). Having a larger group can make the outing easier as well as provide a chance for the Chinese teacher to get to know Americans who work in various professions.
- ❁ Assist the exchange teacher in making connections outside the school and family. For example, try to involve him/her in a book group, a retired educators' group, a sister city committee, or a local university.

- ✿ Build on community connections, such as those that local businesses might have with China. One possible activity is to develop a panel of business people who can meet at a local Rotary Club to speak about their experiences doing business in China. The Chinese teacher could comment on how he/she sees this business influencing life in China.
- ✿ If possible, if financially feasible, and if of interest to your guest, involve the exchange teacher in local recreational activities and/or classes at local facilities where he/she can get some exercise.

## Religious Practice and Holiday Celebrations

Most of the Chinese teachers do not practice religion. They will be curious about American religion and will assume that all Americans are Christian. If your family regularly attends church or synagogue services, it is appropriate to invite the teacher to go along, but do not exert pressure to do so. Some guests will appreciate invitations to special religious services such as weddings, baptisms, and Christmas festivities, but may not be interested or comfortable with regular weekly services. Others will welcome an invitation to a Sunday service once or twice, but may not want to go every week.

Please include the teachers in major holiday celebrations—both religious and secular. If you do not celebrate Christmas or other holidays, explain the reason. The teacher may wish to get an invitation to a Christmas celebration through someone else in the community.

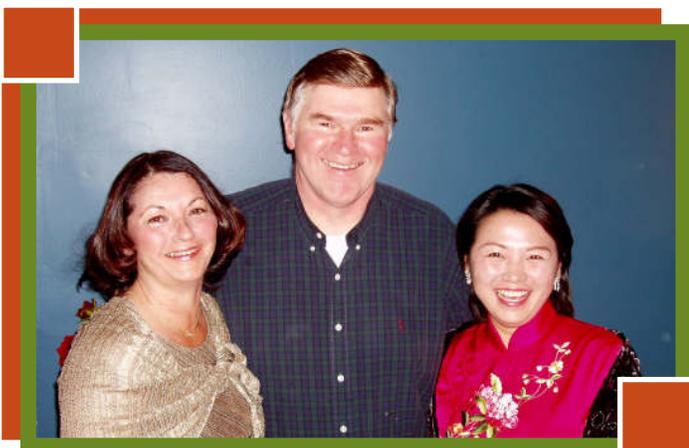
Though the Chinese are not generally religious, they do observe holidays of their own. Exchange teachers' feelings of homesickness are often intensified around Chinese holidays, especially if they go unrecognized. Chinese New Year, which falls in January or February, is a difficult time for many. Find out what holidays are important to your guest and make an effort to recognize them. The Chinese teacher may enjoy planning a celebration and your family will have a valuable opportunity to learn about Chinese culture. Information about Chinese holidays can be found at [www.index-china.com](http://www.index-china.com).

## Places of Interest in the Community

Teachers vary in their level of comfort and degree of initiative in exploring the area independently. It is often easier for teachers to go places without an American guide in those communities where there is more than one exchange teacher, where teachers have been coming for a number of years, and/or there is good public transportation. Exchange teachers who are alone in the district or city will need more assistance from the host family.

Consider the unique aspects of your community that will give the exchange teacher a glimpse of your part of the United States. The following is a list of places and activities that have been suggested by participants in the TEP as of interest to exchange teachers. Included in this list are places and activities that might be available in any community and some that are specific to one city.

- \* Beaches and parks
- \* Farms
- \* Aquariums
- \* Botanical gardens, Chinese gardens, and arboretums



- \* Zoos
- \* Museums
- \* Movies
- \* Theaters
- \* Operas
- \* YMCA
- \* Free cultural events
- \* Parades
- \* Oktoberfest activities
- \* Halloween activities, including trick or treating in costume

- \* Holiday events such as Thanksgiving Day Parade, Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas parties
- \* Religious ceremonies such as weddings, baptisms, the blessing of animals
- \* Pow-wows or exhibits showcasing Native American culture
- \* Charity events or fundraisers
- \* Local high school or college sporting events
- \* Family dinners and celebrations, such as birthday and anniversary parties
- \* Dining out experiences
- \* Renaissance Festivals
- \* Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral
- \* West Point
- \* Staten Island
- \* Coney Island
- \* Local marathons

## Traveling Outside the Community

The teachers will be eager to see the United States during their stay here, but they may have no experience in making their own arrangements. Some Americans travel frequently and easily within the U.S., but this is not the norm in China. Some teachers may avoid travel due to financial concerns, lack of confidence in making arrangements by themselves, or commitment to school work. For others, the value of travel will outweigh these concerns. Some teachers are willing to travel alone; many are not. Keep the following points in mind regarding travel.

- \* Recommend a good travel agent or Chinese travel agent if you know one.
- \* Remind the teacher to leave contact information with you and the National Committee when they travel so he/she can be reached in case of an emergency.

- ❁ Invite the teacher to join you on trips if you wish if they fall during school holidays. If you do not wish to do so, he/she may feel anxious staying alone in your home and may wish to stay with another exchange teacher either in your home or in the other exchange teacher's home. Let the teacher know if you are comfortable with another teacher staying in your home while you are away.
- ❁ If your guest is uncomfortable traveling alone, encourage the teacher to travel with other exchange teachers on weekends or vacations.
- ❁ Keep in mind that the National Committee sponsors a mid-year conference in January during which all of the exchange teachers in the U.S. convene in New York City for a long weekend.
- ❁ Be aware that, during his/her stay in the U.S., the Chinese teacher must comply with rules governing visits to other countries. The visa rules differ for all countries. For Canada and Mexico, the teachers must have a visa for the country to be visited and the DS-2019 form signed in advance by someone at the National Committee. The teacher must apply for the visa at a Consulate or Embassy; the DS-2019 form must be sent and returned by certified mail. The Chinese teacher must return to the U.S. before the expiration date of his/her visa.

## Conclusions



hope that you will use this guide to enhance your experience in hosting a Chinese exchange teacher in your home. Although we have addressed many issues in this guide, it is impossible to anticipate everything that might come up. If problems arise, it is important to talk the situation over with your guest. You also may find it helpful to contact other host families to talk about your experiences. Your school contact person can provide names of previous host families in your community. Also, your guest has a list of the other exchange teachers and contact information for their host families. Or you can get that information directly from the National Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact the National Committee to discuss any issues or questions regarding your hosting experience. Margot Landman, Program Director, can be reached at 212-645-9677, ext. 23, and by email at [mlandman@ncuscr.org](mailto:mlandman@ncuscr.org).

Have fun! This year may be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for your family or you may choose to repeat the experience by hosting another exchange teacher in the future. Whatever the case, know that you are making an invaluable contribution to the exchange program. Thank you!!

## Appendix Resource Information

### *National Committee on United States-China Relations*

[www.ncuscr.org](http://www.ncuscr.org)

Telephone: 212-645-9677, ext 23 for Margot Landman

Email: [mlandman@ncuscr.org](mailto:mlandman@ncuscr.org)

Contact Margot Landman directly at the National Committee with any questions or concerns regarding the exchange program. You may also consult the website for additional information, including programs, publications, articles, and links to other American organizations working with China.

### *Chinese Embassy/Consulates • [www.china-embassy.org/eng/](http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/)*

This website contains addresses, telephone numbers, and fax numbers for the Chinese Embassy and all Consulates General in the U.S. Current China news, visa, and passport information is also available.

### *Social Security Administration • [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)*

On this website, you will be able to access forms, information, rules, and regulations about obtaining a Social Security number for the Chinese exchange teacher. The site also offers links to regional and other Social Security websites that will assist you in locating the nearest office.

### *InSites—A Support Network for Education and Change • [www.insites.org](http://www.insites.org)*

On this website, you may view other documents related to the U.S.-China Teachers Exchange Program. Look under the Projects heading to find guides available to the Chinese exchange teachers and host schools.

### *Online Resources*

There are numerous websites with information about China, as well as many sites that provide names of books and movies related to China. The following two websites provide information about Chinese films.

<http://www.asianfilms.org/china/>

<http://www.dianying.com>