

SO YOU WANT TO STUDY ABROAD IN CHINA...

Finding Common Ground:
A Comprehensive Guide Book to
Studying Abroad in China as an
American Student

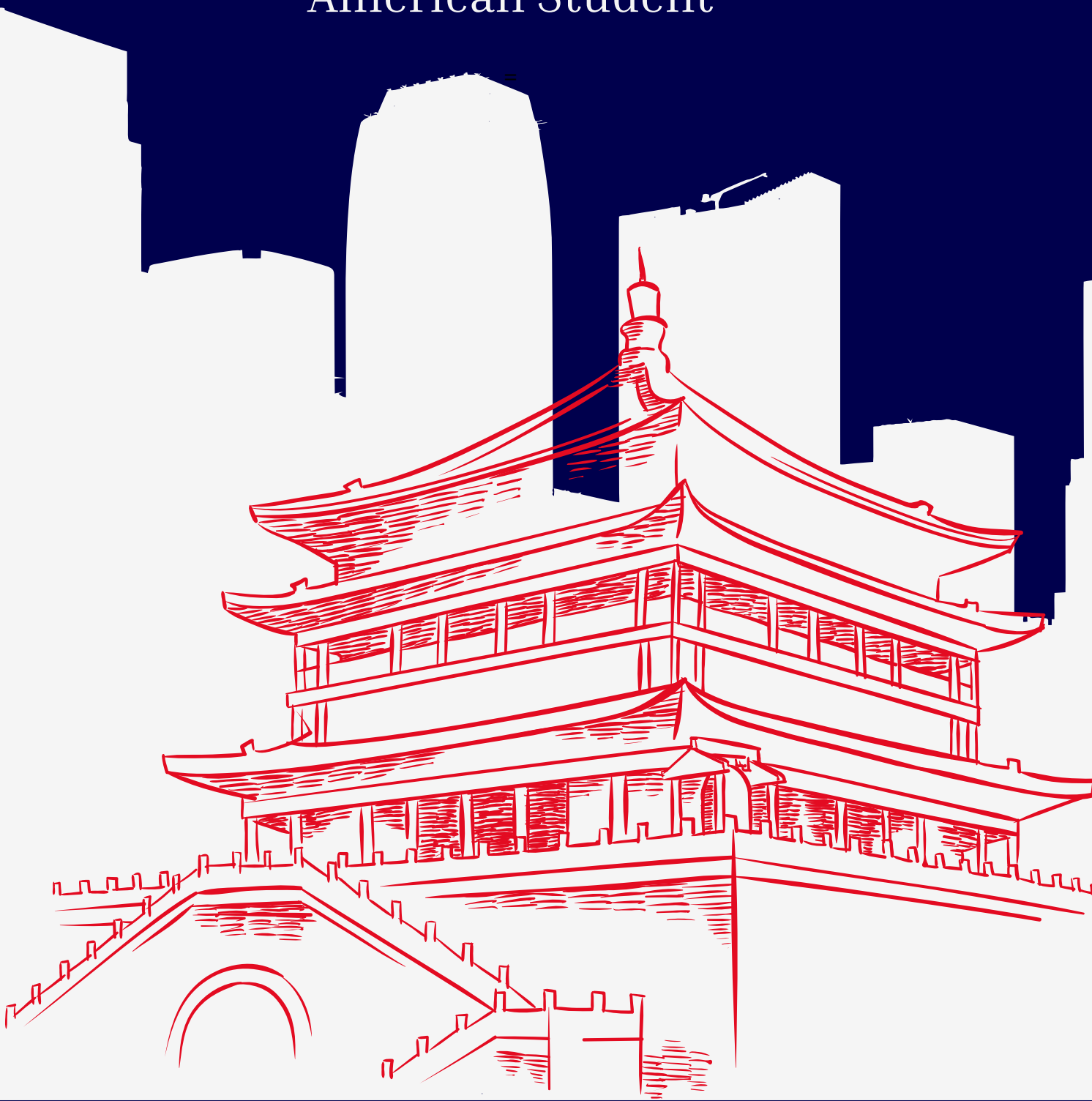


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Introduction

Educational exchange is foundational to productive US-China relations through the cultivation of people-to-people ties and mutual understanding. Educational exchange programs have endured despite differences in cultural, political, and economic systems until recently due to the deterioration of US-China relations and shifting domestic dynamics. From American missionary exchanges in Guangzhou in 1830 to the 100,000 Strong Initiative under the Obama administration, educational exchanges have accompanied and contributed to the evolution of US-China relations. Various factors including the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the worsening of ties, which was reflected in the suspension of Fulbright programs and a steep drop in the number of American students in China. Restoration of people-to-people exchanges is now more important than ever to prevent mutual estrangement and further deterioration of relations.

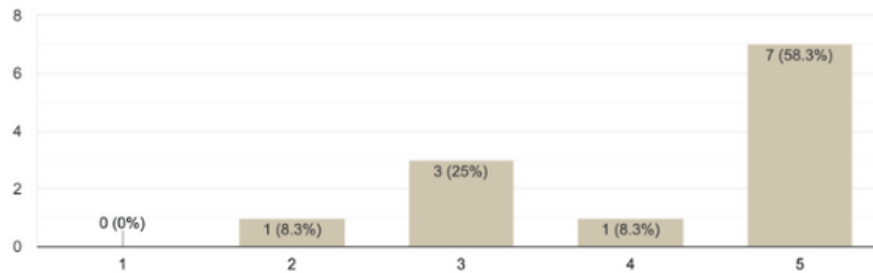
Based on findings from interviews with American students that have traveled to China since the COVID-19 pandemic, this handbook provides insight and strategies for coping with the transition to life in China. Covering everything from how to acquire a Chinese phone number to public transportation navigation, this resource was compiled through the joint effort of American and Chinese professors and students with the goal of encouraging students from the US to undertake the enriching experience of studying abroad in China.



Worries Before Going to China: Survey Results

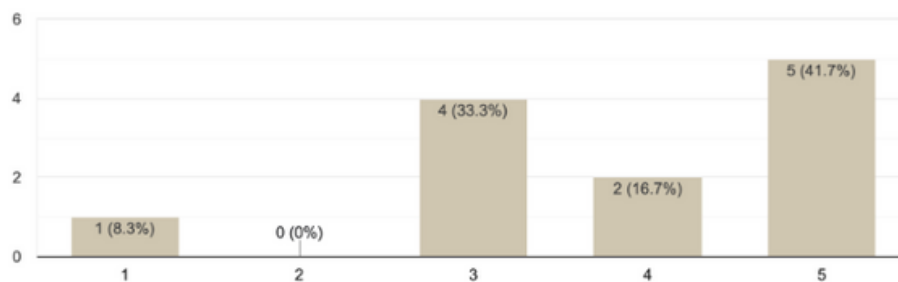
On a scale of 1-5, how interested are you in studying abroad in U.S./China?

12 responses



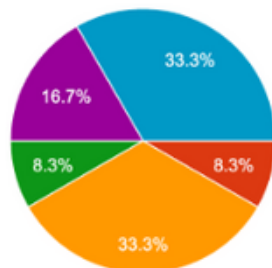
Is it possible to separate the decision of studying in China from China's politics?

12 responses



What is the primary reason that you would want to visit/study/work in China?

12 responses

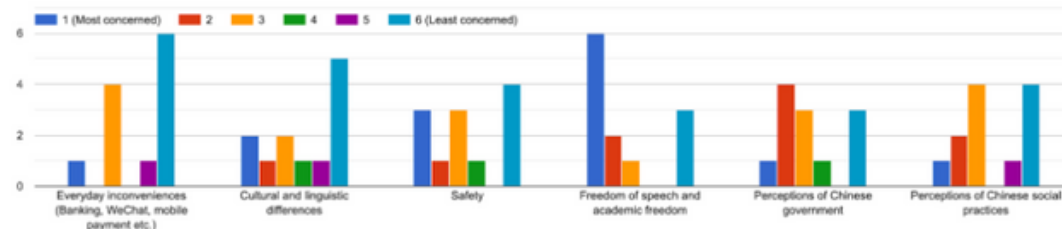


- Affordability
- Professional or Academic opportunities
- Interest in Chinese culture and history
- Interest in Chinese domestic politics
- Interest in China's economic growth
- Interest in international relations



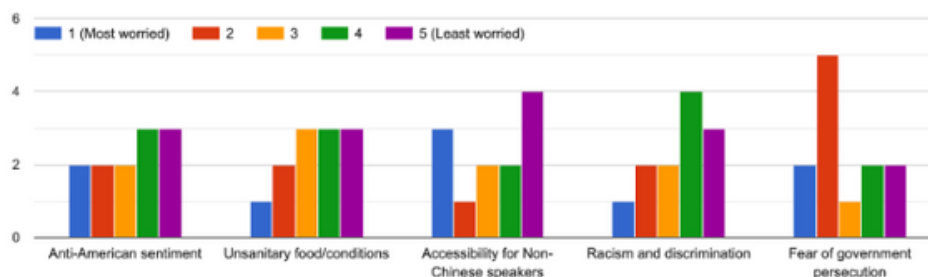
Worries Before Going to China: Findings

Rank your top concerns for going to China.



Concerns about academic freedom ranks top among those of American students. There is some degree of academic freedom for international students programs in China. China needs to better reassure American students that their academic freedoms will be protected while studying there.

Imagine you have just arrived in China. Rank how worried you would be about the following.



It is important to note that Americans of different ethnicities have vastly different experiences with Racism in China. The statistics above is not necessarily reflective of the concerns of Americans of all ethnicities, but just that of the survey respondents.

Based on professional feedback from American educators with substantial experiences in China, the top concern is that American students can't retain some necessities they are used to in China, such as a more open academic environment, availability of mental health services, and acceptance of sexual orientations.

In a more protected environment such as Schwazaman Scholars, students have a drastically different set of concerns. Students are mostly concerned about the cultural barrier and their ability to make the most out of opportunities in China, instead of the more serious concerns mentioned above.



Cultural Understanding: Interview Findings

The "Education" group of the China-U.S. Gen Z Youth Dialogue interviewed 9 exchange students at Tsinghua University from the US, covering various topics such as daily life, learning experiences, and their feelings about studying abroad. These interviews were compiled into a series of videos, each 3-5 minutes long. This section has extracted questions related to cultural and societal aspects, serving as a reference for exchange students coming to China.

Q: How do you feel about the extracurricular activities here in Tsinghua?

x

A: It is fantastic. With regards to clubs and extra curriculars back home, the clubs we have are very specialized clubs. Sometimes they get in, there's a lot of work to do. It is like a whole job advocating. Interviews, you got applications, really brilliant services. It's a lot of work. And there's not a lot of clubs for personal stuff. But we have here. It was awesome. I just scroll around to see what comes available. I made a loop around. I joined a tea club. And I also joined the Fujian association. I joined like the kendo club, 剑道. It was kind of interesting to me with zero experience. It was nice to explore activities you can't do in your own time.



Cultural Understanding: Interview Findings

Q: Can you pick one single highlight of this program in Tsinghua? What's the best part so far?

A: The food here is really unbeatable. I keep thinking it's too good. There are so many different canteens. Most of them are fantastic. There's food for everybody. And obviously if you wanna have other stuff, you can just go local. You have a lot of options here.

Q: Have you learned any Chinese cuisine to cook yourself?

A: Honestly, the extent on my culinary expertise is making ramen noodles and some scrambled eggs. That's really about it. Whether it goes actual cooking, I'm interested but cooking is a lot of work. If you want to make anything substantial, especially Chinese food, you're probably gonna spend at least a couple of hours in the kitchen. I'm kind of lazy and time is certainly an issue. I want to learn how to cook cuz Chinese food is amazing, but it's just not very realistic and it's a lot of work. For studies, homework, meetings and everything. But when I'm not studying, I go out with friends, see what Beijing has to offer. We've been to a few places as of right now, the old Summer Palace. It was underwhelming. And I also tried Peking ducks. It was amazing. But I should be more specific. We have to wait for so long. That was the only downside.



Cultural Understanding: Interview Findings

Q: How long do you have to wait?

A: If you go there at 6 pm, you have to wait for two to three hours. It's upset. As of right now, the Old Summer Palace was huge, first of all, there's a lot of things to see. I don't think we even got to see all of it. It was massive, and it's pretty beautiful.

Q: Have you experienced Beijing's traffic jam?

A: Honestly, I'd rather say the subway can get quite crowded, but at least it'll be on time. I used to live in New York and New York traffic's even worse. You kind of get used to traffic when you're in New York. So it wasn't too big of an interest. Because of the amount of classes I have is so restricted, I try to meet as many Tsinghua students as possible, have lunch, try to hang out. Last semester, Tsinghua sent a couple of people to Princeton. I got to know them and it made things a lot easier to figure out. And obviously, you will know a lot of international students in most of the English courses, the majority of them are international students, whether it be exchanges or otherwise. You make a lot of friends with them.



Cultural Understanding: Interview Findings

Q: If you rate out of ten, how many scores would you give for your first impression of the city?

A: I would say, I give it a solid nine. I think that's really high. Yeah, the food is really, really good, and it's a lot cheaper here. So, what you can do essentially is like, you'll see a price here, for instance, let's say... And then in America, it will be the same number but in US dollars. Yeah, so I would say a big part of that is the food. I've also found that everyone I've talked to has been really, really nice and open. And so I think that's important stuff.



Funding Your Study Abroad

Common sources of funding:

Funding a study abroad program in China can come from a variety of sources, each offering different opportunities and conditions. Here are some of the main avenues you can explore:

- **Scholarships from the Chinese Government:** The Chinese government offers several scholarships for international students through the China Scholarship Council (CSC). These scholarships generally cover tuition, accommodation, a living stipend, and sometimes travel expenses. They are available for undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and language study programs.
- A guide to applying for the Chinese government scholarship can be found here:

https://www.campuschina.org/content/details3_74776.html

University Scholarships: Many universities in China also offer their own scholarships to attract international students. These can vary greatly in terms of what they offer and who they target, so it's worth checking the specific universities you are interested in. For the convenience of international applications, a list of university-level scholarship opportunities has been published by the China Scholarship Council here:

<https://www.campuschina.org/scholarships/index.html>



Funding Your Study Abroad

Home Country Government Scholarships:

- Some countries offer scholarships or grants to their citizens to encourage them to study abroad in China. Alternately, governments and international organizations sign agreements with China to jointly fund their citizens' studies in China. The US government currently does not offer such scholarships, but if you hold a non-US passport, you may be able to obtain funding for your studies in one of these programs:

https://www.campuschina.org/content/details3_74776.html

Private and Non-Profit Scholarships:

Various private organizations and nonprofits provide scholarships for students to study abroad in Asia.

- Freeman-Asia award
- Confucius Institute Scholarship. This is a scholarship designed for aspiring Chinese language teachers and students who are interested in the study of Chinese language, history, and culture. Don't be misguided by the name of the website, the scholarship is not only for international Chinese language teachers:
- http://www.chinese.cn/page/#/pcpage/project_detail
- China-United States Exchange Foundation:
<https://www.cusef.org.hk/en/in-country-programs>
- Offers funded programs partnered with American universities such as Johns Hopkins, UVA, Harvard Kennedy



Funding Your Study Abroad



Young Envoys Scholarship (YES program)

The YES program was established in 2024 to revitalize US-China education exchanges, especially the flow of American students to China. It is a direct attempt that shows China's commitment to fulfilling the goal of having 50,000 American students studying in China by the end of 2035.

- Fund is distributed to waive the application fee and tuition for specific programs
- List of programs funded by the YES scholarship:

<https://en.ceaie.edu.cn/uploads/attached/file/20240226/26298289528089.pdf>



Visas

For Study:

- **X1:** for long-term study in China mainland for a period over 180 days

An X1 student visa is issued to individuals who have secured admission into a course of study at a Chinese university for more than 6 months. This type of visa allows for multiple entries during the duration of the visa. In addition, within 30 days of entering China, students who receive an X1 visa will need to apply for a temporary residence permit.

A visa can only be granted to you by the consulate if you supply the proper documentation regarding the purpose of your stay (i.e., academics) and evidence of accommodations, insurance, and financial support.

- **X2:** for short-term study in China mainland for a period of under 180 days

An X2 student visa is issued to individuals who have secured acceptance into a course of study at a Chinese university for less than 6 months. Please note, the X2 student visa is usually issued for single entry with validity up to 6 months.



Visas

Application Process:

As of October 23, 2023, the Chinese Embassy and Consulates-General in the U.S. provide walk-in visa application services.

- Visa applicants can log on to the China Online Visa Application (COVA) website to fill in the form and then go to the visa section of the corresponding Embassy or Consulate-General to submit the hard copies of visa application documents
- There's no need to make an online appointment beforehand. However, applicants that have made online appointments are given priority for submitting their documents within the corresponding time slot at the appointment date by presenting the AVAS confirmation page upon arrival.

Please see Requirements and Procedures for Chinese Visa Application for the latest information.

For Tourism:

Starting from January 1, 2024, the Chinese Embassy and Consulates-General in the United States simplify application documents required for tourist visa (L-visa). Tourist visa applicants within the United States will no longer be required to submit round-trip air ticket booking record, proof of hotel reservation, itinerary or invitation letter. Since visa applications are processed on a case-by-case basis, please refer to the Chinese Embassy and Consulates-General in the United States for specifics.



WeChat

WeChat (Weixin 微信) is a Chinese instant messaging, social media, and mobile payment app from Tencent. It is the standard app for all business and communications in China, with capabilities ranging from video and voice calling to mini games. Download it on the [App Store](#), for [Android](#), for [Mac](#) or from [Microsoft](#).

- 1) Upon downloading, sign in via Apple ID (if iPhone), Google account (if Android), Facebook account or phone number.
- 2) Set an avatar, username, and password.
- 3) Agree to Terms of Service.
- 4) Solve a short puzzle to verify that you are not a robot.
- 5) Contact a WeChat user who meets the following conditions:

x

1. Signed up for WeChat over 1 month ago if international
6 months ago if Chinese
2. Hasn't completed "Help Friend Register" for other users
in the past month
3. Hasn't been blocked in the past month
4. Has activated WeChat Pay if they are a Chinese
Mainland user

Note: You must have a verified user verify your account.

- 6) Enter your phone number and retrieve a verification code to activate your account.



WeChat

WeChat Account Blocked:

If your WeChat account is banned, you can recover it via phone number verification through the [account recovery site](#).

If you still have trouble with your account or any specific features, find troubleshooting information in the [WeChat Help Center](#).



Phone Number Acquisition and Identity Verification

Chinese Mobile Number:

Example 1: A GWBMA China Mobile number without the international code 186XXXXXXX

(11-digit mobile number)

Example 2: A GWBMA Chinese mobile number with the international code +86186XXXXXXXX

(Country code + 11-digit mobile number)

Main Operators:

China Mobile, China Telecom, and China Unicom

Customer service numbers:

10086 for China Mobile, 10000 for China Telecom, and 10010 for China Unicom

Required Documents:

1. **Valid Passport:** Your passport is the key document to prove your identity and is required for any real-name verification process.

2. **Valid Chinese Visa:** Whether it's a tourist, work, or student visa, make sure your visa is valid and clearly visible in your passport.

Residence Permit (if applicable): For foreigners living in China long-term, a residence permit may also be necessary.



Phone Number Acquisition and Identity Verification

Steps to Follow

Choose a Carrier: First, select a suitable carrier based on your needs. China Mobile, China Telecom, and China Unicom are the three major carriers, each offering different plans and services.

- Visit the Carrier's Retail Store: With your passport and visa in hand, go to the retail store of the carrier you've chosen. There are stores that offer services in English.
- Select a Plan and Services: Choose the most suitable plan based on your call and data usage needs. The staff will help you understand the different options.
- Submit Documents for Real-Name Authentication: Provide the retail store staff with your passport and visa for the real-name authentication process. They will photocopy your documents and associate them with your mobile number.
- Pay for the Service and Activate: Pay the fees for the chosen plan. After these steps, your mobile number will be activated, and you can start using the service.



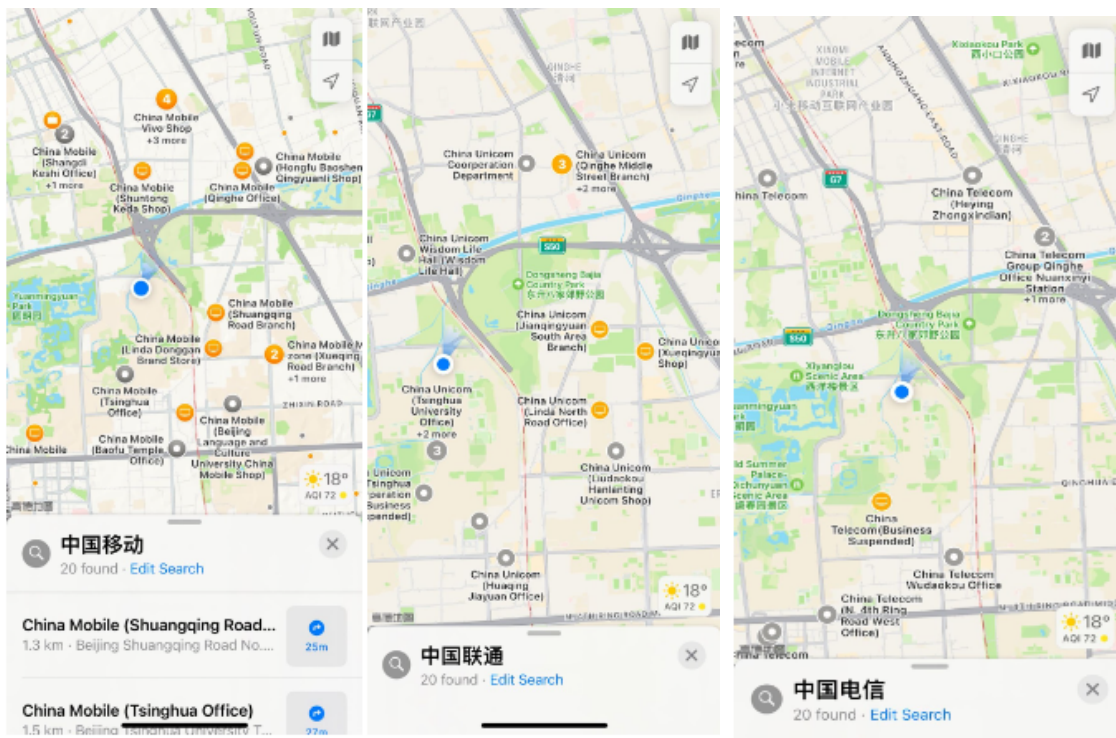
Phone Number Acquisition and Identity Verification

Important Tips

- Ensure that your passport and visa information is accurate and up-to-date.
- Considering potential language barriers, you may want to inquire in advance if there are any stores offering services in English.
- Familiarize yourself with the details of different carriers' plans to choose the service that best meets your needs.
- Go and set your phone number as soon as you arrive in China before your passport is handed in to the university.

Retail Stores Around Tsinghua:

(The orange dots and gray dots shown below)



Bank Account Set Up and Mobile Payments

In China, a bank card is an essential payment tool in everyday life. Whether for shopping, dining, transportation, or other spending situations, bank cards are among the most commonly utilized payment methods. Firstly, the use of bank cards is convenient and fast. By simply inserting the card into a POS machine or scanning a QR code, payment can be completed, avoiding the inconvenience of carrying large sums of cash. This is particularly safer and more convenient for international students, especially when they have just arrived in China. Secondly, bank cards are fundamental to accessing mobile payment services. In China, many mobile payment platforms, such as Alipay and WeChat Pay, require a linked bank card to function. Thus, possessing a bank card is one of the essential prerequisites for international students to use mobile payment services.

Process:

Opening a bank account typically requires submitting a valid passport, student visa (X1 or X2) or a residence permit, a student ID or admission notice, a Chinese mobile phone number and proof of address.

Upon successful account opening, you will usually receive a debit card for daily spending and withdrawals.



Bank Account Set Up and Mobile Payments

The specific steps are as follows:

- 1) Choose a bank, common ones include Bank of China, China Construction Bank, Agricultural Bank of China, and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China.
- 2) Visit the nearest branch of the chosen bank with the above documents.
- 3) Inform the bank staff that you wish to open a savings account.
- 4) Fill in any necessary application forms; there might be a dedicated service window for foreigners.
- 5) Wait for the staff to process your application. They will create a bank account for you and give you a bank card.
- 6) Set up your PIN and make sure your bank card is activated.
- 7) Deposit some funds to open the account (the amount required may differ depending on the bank).

Regarding mobile payments, China is among the global leaders. In China, Alipay and WeChat Pay are the two major mobile payment platforms, covering virtually all daily consumption scenarios. You only need to link your bank card to these payment platforms and complete real-name authentication following the prompts. This process may require providing a mobile phone number, bank card information, and relevant personal information. Once set up, you can enjoy various conveniences such as quick payments, online transfers, bill management, and more.



Bank Account Set Up and Mobile Payments

WeChat Pay

- 1) Search for WeChat in the app store on your phone.
- 2) Download and install WeChat.
- 3) Open WeChat, go to “Me” -> “Wallet”.
- 4) Follow the prompts to link your bank card, which will require entering your bank card details and a verification code that you’ll receive on your phone.
- 5) Create a payment password.

Alipay

- 1) Search for Alipay in the app store on your phone.
- 2) Download and install Alipay.
- 3) Register an account and verify your identity.
- 4) Add your bank card under “Me” -> “Bank Cards”.
- 5) Follow the instructions, which will again require your bank card details and a verification code.
- 6) Create a payment password.

Important Notes

- 1) Real-name verification is essential as it might restrict certain features like transferring money and receiving payments without it.
- 2) Keep your banking information and payment password secure and never disclose them to others.
- 3) Always verify the real name of the person you’re transferring money to in order to avoid being scammed.
- 4) Install and frequently use Chinese antivirus software on your phone to prevent malware infections and privacy breaches.



Transportation within China



Public Transportation

After arriving in Beijing, American students can navigate the city using its extensive public transportation system. Beijing's public transport includes the subway (Metro), buses, and taxis.

1) **Subway (Metro):** The Beijing Subway is one of the largest and busiest in the world. It covers most areas of the city and is the fastest way to get around. The subway map is available in both Chinese and English, and signs inside the stations and trains are also bilingual.

2) **Buses:** Beijing's bus network is extensive and offers a cheaper alternative to the subway. English route information can be scarce, so it might be useful to use a transportation app like Baidu Maps or Google Maps for route planning.

3) **Taxis and Ride-Hailing Services:** Taxis are readily available, and ride-hailing services like Didi Chuxing are popular and convenient.



Transportation within China

These services can be accessed via smartphone apps, though they may require some knowledge of Mandarin to navigate, as English support is limited. For all public transport options, it is advisable to get a transport card, known as the “Yikatong,” which is a rechargeable card that can be used on buses, subways, and even in some taxis, also you can get the Beijing subway card on your apple wallet .This card eliminates the need to buy individual tickets and helps avoid language barriers when purchasing fares.

Bike Sharing

After arriving in China, American students can download the Mobike and Hellobike apps to start riding bicycles. To do this, they should follow these steps:

- 1) Download the Mobike and Hellobike apps from the App Store (for iOS devices) or Google Play Store (for Android devices). If they face difficulties accessing these platforms, they might need to use a VPN.
- 2) Once the apps are installed, open them and sign up using a mobile phone number. They may need a Chinese mobile number for registration. If they do not have a Chinese number, some apps may allow sign up with international numbers, but features and services could be limited.
- 3) After signing up, they’ll need to complete a user profile and verify their identity, usually by providing a photo of their passport.



Transportation within China

4) Add a payment method. This typically involves linking a credit or debit card to the app. Some apps may also accept international payment methods like PayPal.

5) Once the setup is complete, they can use the app to locate and unlock a bicycle. To do this, simply scan the QR code on the bike.

6) After finishing the ride, park the bicycle at a designated area (if specified) or a suitable, legal spot, and lock it to end the ride through the app.

Please note that while Mobike and Hellobike are widely used in China, the availability of English language support may vary. It could be helpful for them to learn some basic Chinese phrases related to bike-sharing, or have a translation app ready to facilitate the process.

High-Speed Trains (High-Speed Rail)

After arriving in China, American students can use high-speed trains or take flights to travel within the country. Here's how they can do it:

1) Purchase tickets either online through official websites like China Railway or at train stations. 12306 is an online platform for purchasing train and high-speed rail tickets. The link is as follows: <https://www.12306.cn/index/>

2) Choose the departure and destination cities, along with the preferred travel date and class of service (e.g., second class, first class).

3) Pay for the tickets using various payment methods, including credit cards or mobile payment apps like WeChat Pay or Alipay.



Transportation within China

4) Collect the tickets either at the train station's ticket office or through automated ticket machines using the booking reference number and identification.

5) Arrive at the train station ahead of departure time to go through security and board the train.

Flights

1) Use flight booking websites or apps like Ctrip or the airline's official website to search for and book flights.

2) Enter the departure and destination airports, along with the travel dates and preferred cabin class.

3) Select from available flight options based on schedule, price, and airline preferences.

4) Provide passenger information and pay for the tickets using credit cards or other accepted payment methods.

5) Receive the e-ticket confirmation via email or mobile app.

6) Arrive at the airport at least a couple of hours before the scheduled departure time to check-in, go through security, and board the flight.

It's important to note that some train stations and airports in China may have limited English signage and staff, so it could be helpful for American students to familiarize themselves with common travel phrases in Chinese or have a translation app handy to navigate through the process smoothly.



Further Contact

We hope that our practical handbook can assist you with your life in China, whether it's for study or exchange. If you require further information or seek assistance, you can contact the creators of the manual via the following means. Additionally, you can join a community helped by volunteers from Tsinghua University Student Association of China-U.S. People-to-people Exchange:

Email: shijiayi22@mails.tsinghua.edu.cn

Wechat ID: SJY15809315411

