HEADING HOME WITH JESUS



William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Preparing Chinese Students to Follow Christ in China

Debbie D. Philip

Heading Home with Jesus: Preparing Chinese Students to Follow Christ in China
© 2018 by Debbie D. Philip

All rights reserved.
No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission of the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with reviews in magazines or newspapers. For permission, email permissions@wclbooks.com.

Scriptures are taken from the NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV): Scripture taken from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION ®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™. Used by permission of Zondervan.

Published by William Carey Library, an imprint of William Carey Publishing
10 W. Dry Creek Cir | Littleton, CO 80120 | www.missionbooks.org

William Carey Publishing is a ministry of Frontier Ventures
1605 E. Elizabeth St | Pasadena, CA 91104 | www.frontierventures.org

Andrew Sloan, copyeditor
Mike Riester, cover design
Koe Pahlka, Mike Riester, interior design

Printed in the United States of America
22 21 20 19 18 5 4 3 2 1 BP500

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Philip, Debbie D., author.
Title: Heading home with Jesus : preparing Chinese students to follow Christ in China / Debbie D. Philip.
Description: Littleton : William Carey Library Publishing, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2018014271 (print) | LCCN 2018015775 (ebook) | ISBN 9780878080731 (mobi) | ISBN 9780878080748 (epub) | ISBN 9780878080724 (pbk. : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Christianity—China—20th century. | Christianity—China—21st century. | Church work with students. | Church work with foreign students.
Classification: LCC BR1288 (ebook) | LCC BR1288 .P45 2018 (print) | DDC 275.1/083--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2018014271

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

1 What's Happening? A Picture to Aid Understanding

> *Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,*
> *ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*
> *Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;*
> *bring an offering and come before him.*
> *Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.*
>
> 1 Chronicles 16:28,29

I would like to share a picture. It's a picture of a person's journey from China, to study abroad, and then back to China. It helps us understand a parallel journey: from life without Christ to life worshiping Christ. But first, here are some reminders of what the Bible says about this subject.

Jesus called people to "repent" (Matt 4:17)—that is, to have a complete change of attitude and behavior toward God. He said that to enter the kingdom of God we must be "born again . . . of the Spirit" (John 3:5–8). He declared himself to be "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He offered salvation: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved" (John 10:9). He urged people:

> "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt 22:37–39)

Time after time Jesus revealed what matters most: humbly acknowledging him (Matt 10:32) and being right with God, then following his loving, sacrificial example (Luke 10:25–37). These matter more than status (Matt 18:1–4; 23:8–12), ritual (Mark 7:1–8), wealth and financial security (Matt 6:19–24; 13:44–46; Mark 10:17–31). Jesus is even to come before family (Matt 10:34–37; Luke 18:28–30).

The Apostle Paul described the believer's new life, directed by the Holy Spirit, as demonstrating the "fruit" of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22,23). Followers of Christ recognize a different authority (Col 1:16–18) and have different values (Rom 12:2), priorities (Matt 6:19–21), and purposes in life (John 15:16). Luke described the first believers forming a new community (Acts 2:42–47), and we see people groups being reconciled, as in the coming together of Jews and Gentiles to form the early church.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Hence, some students should be returning to China with radically changed ideas and priorities, revealed in various ways: in how they spend their time and who they spend it with; in changed relationships; in decisions about jobs; in how they use their abilities and money. The ideas behind the picture can help us understand what is going on when people leave their home culture, go to a completely different culture, profess faith in Christ, and then return to the original culture. They can also help us understand what *needs* to happen if returnees are to continue with Christ.

What Is Conversion?

Psychologist and theologian James Fowler interviewed hundreds of people about their lives and faith stories. He defined conversion as "a significant re-centering of one's previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one's life in a new community of interpretation and action."[7]

I find it helpful to adapt this definition into a list of the *contents* of conversion:

- change in core values;
- change in ideas of where power and authority ultimately lie;
- a changed mental story of how the world works and one's place in it;
- commitment to a new community with shared beliefs and life—and, consequently, important new relationships.

Conversion involves a change in what and whom we put our trust. This reminds me of Paul's words urging the Christians in Rome not to conform to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom 12:2). With renewed minds they were to seek to live by God's values as his people—living out his story and purposes, under his authority, and through his power.

The Personal Framework or "What's in the Suitcase?"

Figure 2 illustrates the faith journey of a student leaving China, encountering Christianity abroad, and then returning home. More about the whole diagram shortly, but first let's consider a part of it: the suitcase. The suitcase represents what students bring with them from China and what they take back. For those who have come to faith abroad, the contents of the suitcase have changed because their *personal framework* has changed.[8]

7 James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning,* (New York: HarperOne, 1981), 281–82.

8 The idea of a "personal framework" comes from Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1989.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

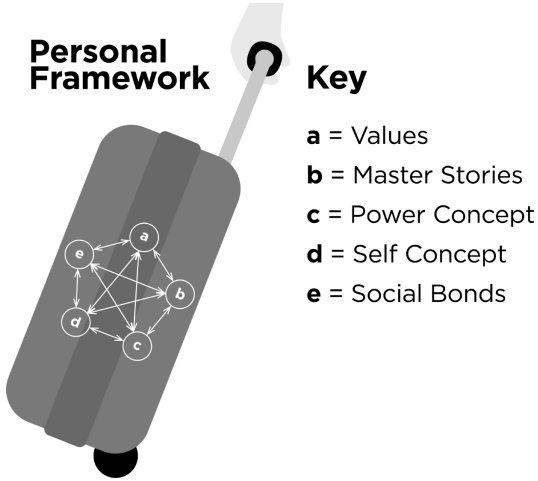


Figure 1: The Personal Framework

Everyone has a personal framework. It develops from birth, in relationship with other people, as we become aware of the world around us and start to respond to it. This framework informs our beliefs, feelings, and actions. Through it we interpret life's events, discern right from wrong, etc. The parts are listed next to the suitcase in Figure 1. You can see that they are pretty much the same things that James Fowler said change when someone becomes a believer.

Our *values* are those things which matter to us the most. Examples include being respected, being loved, glorifying God, attaining financial security, and experiencing justice.

Each person develops his or her own *master stories* or mental picture of how life works. These include worldview concepts, which are often shared by people in their culture: for example, "Is there a god/lots of gods/no gods?" "What happens after death?" They also include more personal ideas about what is normal, like "Women should be married by the time they are twenty-five." Living in communities of shared language and culture, we often develop shared stories.

As each of us grows up, we develop assumptions about who has *power* over us—such as parents, teachers, bosses, police, government, or God. Related to this is our *self-concept*: the ideas, both conscious and subconscious, of who we are and what our role in life is. This might include ideas like "I'm clever," "I'm not as pretty as my friends," "I need to come top in my class at school," or "I'm going to become a banker." Then there are *social bonds*: our relationships with the people and community who matter to us most and influence us most—e.g., family members, classmates, work colleagues.

If one part of the framework changes, the other parts are affected. Imagine that a person's master story changes to include a loving God who knows him and made him for a purpose. Well, then his self-concept changes: he starts to see himself as a loved child of God, rather than either as a hopeless case or a strong

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

person in control of his own destiny. He sees that he has new brothers and sisters (the church) with whom he needs to spend time. Being with other Christians reinforces the biblical master story and helps him trust that ultimate authority lies in his Father God rather than in his parents or the government. Activities and aspirations that were important before are less important as values change.

People are often unaware that they have a framework until their values or stories are challenged. This can happen when there is a crisis and the old assumptions just don't work. It can also happen when they move away from their old relationships and community to a very different one—for example, as an international student.

Explaining the Picture

Now let's look at the larger picture with Figure 2. On the left, a Chinese student in China is about to set off with luggage, passport, and, of course, their personal framework. In the middle, they are abroad. On the right, they have returned to China with their Bible, new beliefs, and changed personal framework. The bar running across the bottom of the diagram represents the surrounding context that influences the student: the social contexts of China and their country of study, with their different histories and cultures. Church culture also varies from country to country.

Let's call our student Zhang. As he leaves China, Zhang is not consciously thinking about any of this! He does have values and assumptions about the way life works, however, even if he has never verbalized them.

What are his master stories? Might they include some worldview or big-picture stuff like: 'God? No, I don't believe any of that. I'm an educated guy, so I'm an atheist.' Grandma burns incense at the temple sometimes, and at festivals Zhang kowtows to the idols to please her. But gods and stuff—well, that's superstition. Zhang's life expectations? To get a good job, find a nice girl, travel the world. Relationships? Zhang struggles with his dad sometimes, and he wishes his parents would get off his back; but he'll look after them.

Anyway, let's get on that plane! A master's degree abroad—freedom!

Away from the demands of his home environment, Zhang has an opportunity to explore new places, lifestyles, and ideas. He meets people from different cultures and backgrounds, including Christians. He is puzzled. "Why do these people go to Globe Café[9] and talk to international students every week? Why are they so kind about offering rides? What do they want? Well, they don't seem to want anthing, but they sure ask some strange questions! Why do they do what they do?"

Then Zhang thinks, "They're harmless enough; I'll try this Bible study . . . Wow, these people are educated, and they actually believe God exists. Not only that, they think he is interested in them! What's going on? I like these people, I want to be with them, but I have never thought about these ideas."

9 Globe Cafés, popular in the UK, are organized by churches or Christian students to help international students feel at home, practice their English, and learn about Christianity—if they wish. These regular social gatherings go by various names, but Globe Café is the most common.

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

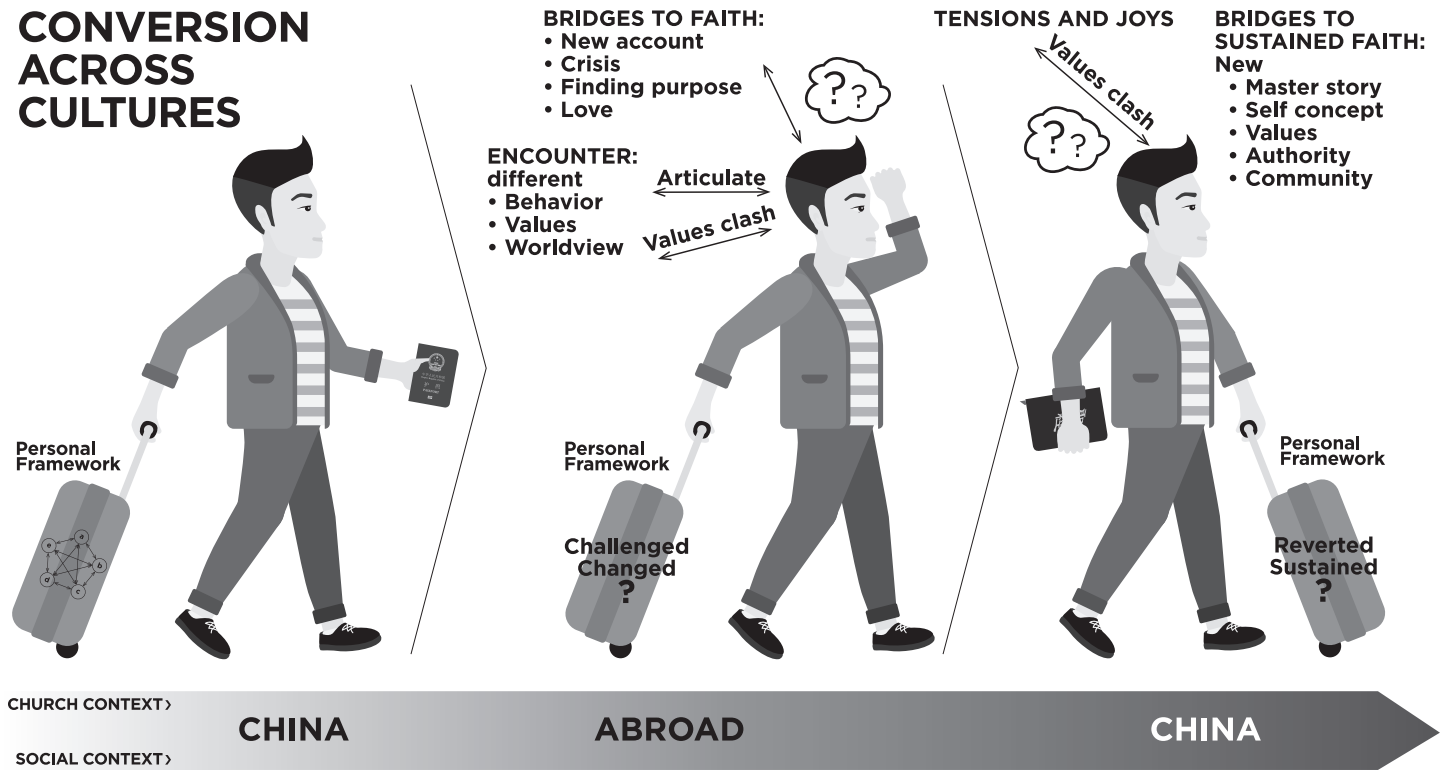


Figure 2: Conversion Across Cultures

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.

Thank you for reading this preview.
To purchase a copy of this book, visit:

https://missionbooks.org/products/heading-home-with-jesus

William Carey Publishing. Copyrighted content.