

Speak To The Students Who Want to Go to America

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Most Chinese students want to go to America for pursuing their advanced education after they complete the college education on Taiwan. Now I would like to speak a few words based on my personal experiences and observations. So far as I know, many Chinese students think only of the glamor and prestige of going to America, and do not understand the problems soon enough. But a journey begun with a full understanding of the difficulties, problems and prospects, has a better chance of success than one undertaken blindly without adequate preparation.

ADAPTABILITY NECESSARY

Your study in America pre-supposes a transition from your culture to a different culture. The United States is such a vast country that its culture has often been called a culture of paradoxes. Yet, whatever be your destination in America, the basic problems will be somewhat the same. Every thing including the climate, the food, housing facilities, human relations, and even the educational system is so different from that of China that you will need adaptability.

Your first culture shock will be the sheer size of the big cities such as New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Boston where you will land. and the height of the buildings, the mass of strangers, the hurry and the noise. Suddenly you will feel extremely lonely and lost. To your surprise, you will discover that you are now responsible for every activity connected with your life. People will guide you and direct you, and some will make friendly suggestions. But it is you who have to carry your own baggage, find a place to live, do your shopping and a thousand other things. This is the American system of "self-reliance". It involves personal responsibility and hard work.

Most Chinese students complain that American food is dry, and tasteless. Americans do not eat the type of food people eat in China, Chinese restaurants are scarce and expensive; and many complain that their food is poor. One solution is to live in a place with cooking facilities and cook your own food if you have time. This is economical and it satisfies your taste. You can buy most of your spices and ingredients here. But, on the other hand, if you do not live in a college dormitory, or a fraternity house, you miss an unusual opportunity for group life.

SOCIAL MANNERS

I am sure you will be invited to visit American families. They call it "home hospitality". I think it is a very interesting and exciting part of your living to visit American homes. It will be useful for you to know certain things about the American idea of good manners.

First of all, time is an extremely important element in American life. Always be prompt for your appointments. Even for your study or work it would be wise to budget your time carefully.

Secondly, do not ask your American friends questions of a personal nature, such as: "How much do you earn?" "What is your age?" Americans consider it bad manners to ask questions on what they regard as private affairs. But you can ask general questions about America and American life. And they will ask you many questions about your

country. If you make an effort to give a correct picture of your country, your hosts will appreciate this very much. That is why it is important for you to know something about your country before you come, especially on socio-economic and political matters.

Thirdly, do not expect your American friends to solve your personal problems and worries and do not talk too much about them. They may help you by giving suggestions and guidance, but in general they believe in self-reliance. It is considered good manners to be cheerful in their company. Of course, if you are in real difficulties, you will find peoplelike foreign students advisers and student counselors who will try to help you.

Except for certain basic social manners such these, Americans are informal and tolerant, and you will certainly enjoy their company.

FINANCIAL PROBLEM

The most serious matter that students face in America as I know is the high cost of living. Perhaps you are counting on earning some money to supplement the financial resources you bring with you. This may not be as easy as you think. However qualified you are, and whatever degrees you may hold from Asian universities, still you will find it difficult to find a job. There is unemployment even in America, and an employer usually prefers to employ a person of his own nationality rather than a foreigner who is still unfamiliar with the culture and the ways of doing things in America.

You may accept part-time employment or summer employment if it is necessary for your maintenance as a student. you may also accept employment in a field related to your study to obtain practical training. But in any of these cases you have to get permission from the nearest office of The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service before you take up employment, and your application has to be endorsed by an authorized school official, usually the foreign student adviser.

Many students have or can earn some extra money to supplement funds for necessary maintenance. They work as messengers, file clerks, laboratory workers library assistants, typists, carriers, waiters at cafeterias. Remember manual jobs are not looked down upon in America, and you should be ready to accept one if it is available.

In short, I would suggest that you should not be over confident about earning money. Failure to understand this may lead you into the most difficult situation you have ever experienced in your life. Too many students have taken undue risks in this regard and have suffered greatly as a result.

ACADAMIC WORK

Your main purpose in going to America, I presume, is to receive special training and higher education. You will be required to study regularly, do much reading and pass various examinations. To attain the required standard is a full time occupation in itself.

Proficiency in English is an essential prerequisite for your success in school in social intercourse. Be sure to equip yourself with a good command of English before you go to America. Even if you do, American English will seem to you strange and difficult at first, The pronunciation and accent are somewhat different. However, if you listen carefully you will get used to it.

Americans lead a fast and strenuous life. Since you go from a culture where life is much slower and more relaxed, you are not very well prepared for the speed, the competitiveness, the "rugged individualism" which are the major elements of the American way of life. Your personal qualities such as adaptability, good humor, openness of mind, friendliness, patience and, above all, readiness to work hard will be real assets for your success in America.