

**Understanding the Post-85/90 Generation:  
A Six Dimensional Analysis of This New Generation of International Students  
–AFC Training Ministry’s White Paper on Post-85/90 Generation**

Ever since the birth of Ambassadors For Christ, Inc. (AFC) in 1963 and according to the clear vision and commandments given by our LORD, we have endeavored to lead Chinese students and professionals in North America and in the rest of the world to Christ. We seek to equip them to become disciples of Jesus and to encourage them to contextualize their beliefs into their daily lives in order to serve Christ and to become new forces for God’s kingdom. Facing challenges from this new generation, we established the ‘Post-85/90 Generation Training Ministry’ as a response to the influx of Chinese students who surged onto North American campuses since 2006. The mission of this ministry is to equip both churches and individual believers in North America to better evangelize and to make disciples of this new wave of post-85/90-generation undergraduate and graduate students, and to challenge them to become involved in global missions.

After more than 12 months of planning and research, the ‘Post-85/90s Student Ministry Consultation Conference’ was held from October 16 to 19, 2013 at AFC’s headquarters. We carefully invited experienced field experts in the area of post-85/90 student ministry to gather and discuss our understanding of these students, as well as how to develop a philosophy, framework and models for strategic campus ministry based on the needs of these students. We also explored future prospects for campus ministry with this new generation in North America and compiled all our materials into *AFC’s Post-85/90 Generation Campus Ministry White Paper*. It is our hope that this document will provide development guidelines for AFC’s training ministry, and that it will be shared with individual believers and other Christian organizations that have a heart for this new generation of Chinese students in North America. Together, we look forward to learning how to care for this new generation of students, to understand their innermost longings, to walk alongside them to foster their growth, and to invite them to receive the vision of God’s kingdom and to participate in the Great Commission with us.

*Understanding the Post 85/90 Generation: A Six Dimensional Analysis of this New Generation of International Students* is the first part of this White Paper; there will be other parts to follow.

**Dimension I: Distinctive Social Features across Two Generations of The Family-Of-Origin Were Formed by China’s Drastic Historical and Social Changes.**

*Material Feature of the Family:* The Family-of-Origin that suffered material deficiencies tends to express care and love for children through material possessions.

*Social Feature of the Family:* The Family-of-Origin that weathered social disintegration distrusts society and tends to project their social insecurities onto the next generation. Parents expect their children to live under a better social environment, so they appear to be overtly anxious, manipulative or overindulging toward their children’s lives in both the present and the future.

***Religious Feature of the Family:*** The Family-of-Origin that paid a great price for their beliefs (traditional, atheistic ideology or Christianity) became disillusioned with their belief system, thus they tend not to pass their belief and value systems to the next generation. Because atheism and materialism couldn't effectively become the core of ideological education in the family, the original humanism and other spiritual capital was lost through persecution. This created a belief system vacuum for the next generation.

***Feature of Intergenerational Relationships within the Family:*** The Family-of-Origin that realized their growth deficiency tends to seek compensation through the next generation. Some Families-of-Origin lack the experience of being loved; therefore, they do not understand how to express love. Because of their lack of humanistic ideology and spiritual capital, they could only resort to manipulative measures in parenting. They used material possessions, power, social networks, etc. to express concern for their children, and they expect to receive a return on their investment (ROI). These ways of parenting damaged and distorted their children's personalities.

***Feature of the Family's Personality:*** The Family-of-Origin that distrusted the social environment tends toward enmeshment: family members are overly dependent on one another. The positive and negative characteristics of the two generations enmeshed to form one another's personality. Living in an untrustworthy world on the verge of collapsing, only the family may be trusted in order to counter despair and crisis. Among many dysfunctional families, a close relative (an aunt or cousin) often plays the key role in the next generations' life.

***Physical Feature of Intergeneration:*** The Post 85/90 generation was born during a time of economic prosperity in China without the first-hand experiences of economic depression or famine which the previous generation had endured. They were well nourished during their childhood, and as a result they are physically stronger and more vigorous and graceful than their parents' generation. Consequently, many pay more attention to their health and appearance, and are more concerned about preventative healthcare.

***Material Possessions and Personal Relationships:*** The Post 85/90 generation in China is confused by the complex and interwoven relationships between material possessions and personal intimacy. They question whether material possessions determine relationships, yet their material pursuits are motivated by a desire for personal relationships, and their relational pursuits cannot break away from material considerations. This is reflected in their relationships with their Family-of-Origin, their peers and their spouses.

***Depth of Intergenerational Relationships:*** As a whole, the Post-85/90 generation in China has been affected more by China's drastic historical and social changes since the 1960s than their peers who have grown up overseas. Compared to other second generation Chinese who were born and raised overseas, self-image formation among the Post-85/90 generation in China has been more influenced by their Family-of-Origin. Therefore, when evangelizing the Chinese Post-85/90 generation and partnering with them on their journey

of spiritual growth, showing concern for their relationships with their Family-of-Origin is a natural starting point.

***Desires of the Heart and the Starting Point for the Gospel:*** Each individual Post-85/90 generation student has a unique story about their Family-of-Origin. So, it is inappropriate to stereotype each individual's personality traits and relationship with their Family-of-Origin. Rather, one should take into consideration the specific differences of their family life experiences, especially their relationships with their mother, their grandparents or other specific family members (an aunt, for instance). Often these relationships are strongly co-dependent and complex. And the fear of being separated from their loved ones, either in life or in death is often present. Many are already suffering the former, so they are much more fearful of eternal separation with their loved ones as a result of death. Additionally, if entangled with unreconciled scars and conflicts from the past, this often becomes the starting point for the Gospel and a window to introduce the redemptive love of the Cross as well as the power of resurrection. When we involve ourselves deeply into their life and soul; when we pray for their relationships with their Family-of-Origin; when we counsel them to construct God-centered views about personal relationships and about true love; we are leading them onto the path of self-transformation and life-reconstruction.

***Feature of their Spirituality and their Openness for the Gospel:*** The Post-85/90 generation in China has a better chance of preserving their innocence and moral conscience, because they did not live through the material deficiencies, social deconstruction, and the belief system disillusionment which their Families-of-Origin experienced. In light of the ever-increasing immorality in contemporary Chinese society, they cry out for goodness and beauty, and they are more interested in regaining religious beliefs that were discarded by the previous generation. In fact, because of their openness towards religion and new ideas, Christianity grew rapidly among this former atheistic Post-85/90 generation both on campuses as well as in cities in China. This trend has been gathering momentum and is continuously developing.

***Inter-generational Relationships and Passing the Torch of the Gospel:*** Compared to prior generations, the parents of this Chinese Post-85/90 generation exhibit much higher degrees of acceptance for their children's commitment to Christianity and even seminary training. This does not necessarily mean that these parents are more open-minded, but rather they are willing to respect and support their children's choices. Precisely because of this co-dependent kinship, the Post-85/90 generation is more likely to evangelize their parents' generation.

***Social Changes and Inter-generational Differences:*** Based on observations, the Post-80s generation is slightly different from the Post-90s generation. The former experienced more dramatic social changes and their families endured more serious suppression from the government. Therefore, the Post-80s generation appears to be more self-focused and anxious. Relatively speaking, the Post-90s generation's Family-of-Origin underwent less dramatic social changes and endured less governmental suppression. However, growing up in a transformed Chinese society, the Post-90s generation seems to

be much more spiritually empty, more emotionally fragile, and more materialistic compared to the Post-80s generation. Yet, they appear to be more practical ideologically.

**Dimension II: China's One-Child Policy Cultivated a Generation of Dual-Personalities: Highly Independent and Highly Dependent.**

*Characteristics of the Only Child Generation:* Although China's One-Child Policy has not been consistently implemented so there individuals with siblings among the Post-80s and Post-90s generation, there is a higher percentage of only children among the Post-90s generation than among the Post-80s generation. Hence, we cannot simply regard all the Post-85/90 generation as the Only-Child generation. However, due to gender discrimination, gender-oriented parenting, and the great age gap among non-only-child siblings, many individuals with siblings display the distinctive characteristics of only-children.

*Highly Independent Characteristics:* The One-Child policy produced a “protecting the endangered” phenomenon in Chinese families which has changed the family power structure in traditional Chinese society. In today's Chinese one-child families, many only children receive more attention and are given more respect than they had in more traditional families. They even have the right to participate in family decision-making in non-traditional ways. This makes them identify with the adult world early on, it forms their “Little Adult” personalities, and it cultivates their self-awareness as well as their independent thinking.

*Highly Dependent Characteristics:* At the same time, many only-children grew up under intense supervision, support and protection from family members. This lessened the chance of developing self-care abilities as well as independency in dealing with social realities. Once they grew overly dependent on specific family members, chances of the child being doted on increased. Two contradicting growth directions facilitated their dual-personality of being highly dependent and independent at the same time.

*“Strawberry Generation” Traits:* If the Family-of-Origin is unable to instruct and support the only-child with humanistic thought and spiritual capital (please cross reference with analysis of the First Dimension above), but uses mainly manipulative means to support them—materialism, power, and social connections—they give birth to a generation with easily bruised, strawberry-like traits. On the one hand, they have deep inner longings for independence. Yet, on the other hand, they lack the internal resources necessary to face the pressures of reality which results in greater frustration and anxiety. The Family-of-Origin with an only-child often cannot understand that this material rich generation is enduring even greater inner pressure. They have high self-expectations and less internal resources, which lead to lofty yet unrealistic minds or huge gaps between self-idealism and self-actualization. Many only-children regard themselves as perfectionists, and although they have financial support from their family, they often experience spiritual poverty, especially in conquering their shortcomings.

***Dependent Feature in Peer Relations:*** Compared to those with siblings, many only-children value friendships more and cherish more their relationships with peers. In the absence of siblings, friendships are more likely to be as strong and deep as blood kinship. Thus, some only-children fear peer-pressure more than other members of their family-of-origin.

***Psychological Distress from Peer Relations:*** This only-child-generation displays more equality and mutual respect in their interpersonal relationships as well as a greater willingness to communicate with their peers. Because they expect more from themselves and their interpersonal relationships, yet because they lack the spiritual resources to handle real and complex issues, interpersonal problems among this only-child generation are extremely tangled. This creates various forms of psychological and emotional distress.

***Social Impact on Interpersonal Relationships:*** Often, interpersonal relationships of the Chinese Post-85/90 generation begin through sharing material recreation with one another. Since the prior generation did not pass onto them any other skills to develop interpersonal relationships, and since they have never thought of any other ways to enhance good relationships, a stereotype exists in their minds that the material is the only foundation for interpersonal relationships. But, they are also aware that material possessions cannot solve many delicate and complex problems in interpersonal relationships. This phenomenon reflects the social consequences of an imbalanced development between over-pursuing material prosperity while neglecting spiritual progress.

***Approaches to Problem-solving:*** It is observed among the Post-85/90 Chinese students that although they easily find their own circle of friends, they tend to immediately search for solutions to problems by themselves rather than discussing their problems with friends. They may express their needs through social media rather than consulting individually with a close friend. They value friendship, yet they may not be able to take advantage of their friendships on all levels in life.

***Sexual Experience and Emotional Distress:*** Compared to their parents' generation, many among the Post-85/90 generation take a rather liberal attitude towards sexual relations. The practices of cohabitation as well as homosexuality appear to be more popular and acceptable. The reason behind this attitude is not necessarily because they are against traditional ethical values, but rather because of the consequences of blind conformity to public opinion as well as gratifying sexual desires in intimate relationships that lack spiritual resources. (In fact, traditional ethical values in China are at the verge of collapsing, and many of them have never received clear teaching about sexual ethics.) As the Post-85/90 generation enters the life stage for marriage and starting a family, many are still perplexed, confused, afraid, and angry and are at a loss about issues like gender identity, sexual relations, marriage relations, parenting, and so on. For those who are suffering from sexual addictions, perhaps their deeper problem is about not knowing how to nurture a loving relationship so that many of them are miserably subjected to manipulative sexual entanglements. When serving these people, one needs a gentle and empathetic attitude as well as an in-depth understanding of their sufferings in order to help them to gradually understand the value and benefits of Christian sexual ethics. Rather than blindly blaming

or punishing them for their immorality, one should understand that they are also sacrificial victims of a society lacking in moral values.

***Social Values and their Influences:*** The one-child generation appears to be more dissatisfied with autocracy, authoritative society, enclosed cultural values and class inequality. They appear to have stronger reactions towards social injustice as well as positive notions of social participation, even taking public actions. Community culture constructed by this only-child generation often possesses equality, respect, open-mindedness and multi-culturalism, etc., as well as more emphasis on self-expression. Compared to the previous generation's rural family churches, the Post-85/90 generation based campus groups, Chinese Urban Churches and fellowships that the Post-85/90 generation is involved in would choose more open, transparent, organized and systematic models of operation. It is rather difficult for us to imagine that when this generation formally involves themselves in churches, business corporations, societies and even political institutions in China, they would choose to maintain an autocratic, closed and unequal social system.

***Characteristics of the Only-Child Generation—the starting point for the Gospel:*** China produced an entire generation of only-children, a rare phenomenon in the history of human civilization. History offers no cut-and-dried human resources to guide them in organizing a society exclusively belonging to only-children. How the Post-80s only-child generation has formed their views on society, family and politics will become learning models for the Post-90s only-child generation to a certain extent. Among the Post-80s only-child generation, there are chances for large numbers of leaders who could influence the Post-90s only-child generation to emerge from all professions. In student ministry, those who serve the Post-85/90s generation may feel that, as a whole, these students are more attentive to their own feelings, more persistent in decision-making through persuasion rather than by coercion, and more expressive of personal opinions (independency). At the same time, they expect more emotionally in terms of mutual reactions, being understood, being affirmed and being supported (dependency). Those who work with them need to understand their dual personality, that they are both highly independent and highly dependent, in order to guide their growth with patience, respect, wisdom and love.

***Focus of the Gospel and Discipleship:*** According to what we have already discussed, the both highly independent and highly dependent dual-personality of this only-child generation makes dealing with interpersonal relations, readjusting self-images and managing emotional problems top priorities when preaching the Gospel or training disciples. “Humans are made in the image and likeness of God,” “Boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh,” “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,” “love one another as Christ has loved us,” “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” These Gospel truths are what this generation of only-children most desperately needs to hear, understand, internalize and to practice repeatedly until experiencing life transformation.

**Dimension III: the Development of an Economic Oriented Educational System, Which Values Intellectual Achievement and Professional Performance Alone, and Ignores Holistic Development.**

***An Imbalanced Concept of Education that values academic performance and ignores holistic development:*** Under the spell of rapid economic development, the Chinese educational system is, like many other economically developed nations, dominated by national economic development, and emphasizes intellectual achievement and professional performance alone. The Family-Of-Origin also views “study” and “going to a good university” as the only educational goals and ignores young people’s needs for moral, physical, and aesthetic development. They underestimate the need for holistic self-understanding and care, thus causing delayed maturation among teenagers, even those in Christian families. This phenomenon is not unique to the Post 85/90 generation in China; it also happens among other Chinese societies. However, based on our observation, this phenomenon is extremely apparent among the Post 85/90 group of students from China studying in America.

***Deficiency in Holistic Development:*** Some of the self-care skills, emotion management abilities and social skills of the post-85/90 generation university students remain at a teenage level. Thus, North American churches and campus ministers may help provide assistance for their holistic development through such services as: airport pick-ups, arranging grocery shopping, handling daily chores, facilitating socialization, assistance in managing emotions, introducing American traffic laws and the judicial system, how to apply for a driver’s license and a credit card, learning American culture, honesty as a standard of morality, etc.

***Cost of Cultivating Special Talents:*** In order to cultivate their children’s special talents, some Families-of-Origin deliberately distort a holistic approach to development. They stake all on developing one special talent, such as music, to actualize their family’s dreams. A few have achieved remarkable success, but more have experienced disaster in the midst of such brutal competition, and have consequently lost opportunities for holistic development. A number of these children are irreconcilably estranged from their Family-of-Origin.

***Introducing Holistic Career Counseling Based on Christian Faith:*** In selecting a major field of study and a career, some students based their choices on the intentions of their Family-of-Origin, their preferred social climate or the possibility of economic advancement rather than taking into account individual aptitudes and potential. Consequently, they lack self-understanding as well as an understanding of the social and professional environments of their chosen fields. Thus, professional and career counseling seminars can assist in providing guidance in interpersonal problems that are related to family, emotions and self-image. Such seminars can help students achieve in-depth understanding of the values, worldviews and inner motives behind career choices, and to learn more about constructing God-centered values and worldviews to pursue inner life changes and facilitate holistic development.

**Dimension IV: Post-modernity and Globalization Render Enormous Pressures on Young People to Seek Prematurely Self-recognition, Peer-recognition and to Develop an Individual Identity.**

***Rapid World Development and Crushed Lives:*** Globalization and the rapid development of information and economies push the whole world into fierce competition. Facing the pressure of developing individual characteristics, young people are forced to form their individual identity for peer recognition early on. The whole world is asking today's youth, "Who are you? What makes you distinct from another? What can you contribute?" Young people from the previous generation only needed to find their professions, and that was enough to establish themselves. As for this generation's young people, it is not enough to merely find one's profession; they need to form their personal identity, style and distinctive values in a group. In other words, at an even younger age, they must know their life's calling and such immense social pressure is unimaginable to the previous generation.

***The Secular School Education Crisis and Exploring A Way Out:*** The existing education system emphasizes narrow professional techniques and ignores broader humanities and social science education; this provides limited resources for young people to find individual recognition and personal identity. What young people need more are cultural, humanities, and faith resources that can provide creativity in response to the challenges of globalization and post-modernity. Therefore, many young people have realized that school is but a channel for obtaining professional skills, and a job is but a tool for making a living. This reflects a serious crisis in today's secular education in which one has to look elsewhere for a personal anchor and identity. What they are searching for are shared values and community cultures that they could identify with and that are sustainable and distinctive without being weird. Hence, young people no longer turn to families and schools to provide key resources with answers for life's problems. Rather, they turn to their peers, pop culture and various multi-values social groups.

***Peer Relations and Searching through Online Games:*** Post-modern society consists of numerous, diverse small social networks. There is more freedom in terms of individual choices but more distant relations between individuals and society as a whole. Lacking a universal value system which allows young people to anchor their lives and beliefs, they seek small groups they could identify with and adjust to, in order to avoid becoming marginalized in society, which is a great challenge for them. Hence, role-plays become the most popular game modules because students can change their self-image and group identification arbitrarily, and then search for the best self-fitting survival strategies without any need to take serious responsibilities in real life.

***Fellowship and Discipleship Strategies:*** Young people who live under post-modernity aren't necessarily motivated to participate in church to seek faith, rather it may very well be to search for a sense of belonging to a community. Compared to the previous generation, they are more likely to join the fellowship first and worship second rather than vice versa. Thus, the importance of building fellowships is more important in a post-modern society. However, we also need to keep in mind that today's young people often



have a relative and diverse attitude about values. Although they are willing to meet expectations of the church and to perform various Christian duties, this is not the same as truly believing in Christianity from their hearts. Therefore, providing in-depth discipleship teaching becomes vital for faith development for post-modern young people.

***The Equal Importance of Individual Growth and Fellowship in Ministries:*** We have observed that among this Post-85/90 generation, some identify with their conservative spiritual elders and imitate their spiritual appearance and spiritual terminologies, but their inner lives are rather immature. They may be preferred by their conservative elders, and yet not be accepted by their peers. Thus, they are more likely to fall into the temptation of spiritual pride. Mentors need to have keen insight, and guide them to develop in faith in the grace of our Lord and to grow with the entire fellowship.

***The Meaning of Small Group Discipleship:*** Small group discipleship should not only deliver content, but also provide group-oriented life that young people can identify with and belong to. Building a trusting and open atmosphere in the group, while sharing and learning is key to success in discipleship.

***The Goal of Self-Construction Connected with Christ:*** Forming self-images that are based on Christian beliefs offers an ultimate goal and redemptive guidance for individuals who live in post-modern societies. Beliefs such as “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17 ESV) can help young people face themselves and accept life-changing possibilities. Texts like “Alive in Christ” (Rom. 6:11 ESV) and “Imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1) can encourage young people to break through their limitations and begin life-changing journeys.

***The Contextualization of Theological Concepts as Guidance for Campus Ministry:*** Christianity possesses universal values, and it provides a degree of stability for young people in the midst of this fragmented post-modern social environment. It can also help them to construct social groups that they may anchor them. Although churches and fellowships are diverse, there is unity: “though many members but one body” (Rom. 12:4-5 EVS). The Church thus needs to be discerning in regard to various theological, biblical, worldview and ethical topics of discussion. Seeking unity in essentials and allowing diversity in non-essentials, as a fellowship and church, is a pastoral philosophy that needs to be deepened in post-modern social contexts.

***The Application of Theological Contextualization and Its Starting Point in Today’s Campus Ministry:*** Generally, topics that the previous generation of Chinese intellectuals paid close attention to when Christian beliefs were spreading among them, such as faith and science, theism and atheism, monotheism and polytheism, creation and evolution, no longer have evangelical importance to this new generation. Instead, they focus on subjects like self-actualization, interpersonal relations, the purpose and value of existence, family and marriage, emotion management, and social justice. This is not to say that this generation has no need to rethink the relationship between faith and science or issues related to atheism. However, these topics are no longer the most ideal starting point when evangelizing this post-85/90 generation.

***Christian Traits of This New Generation:*** The faith heritage among the previous generation in Chinese churches emphasized individual spiritual discipline and family ethics. They valued personal devotions, and relatively neglected fellowship, and they valued obedience over authority, and relatively neglected theological education. But, this new generation of Christians is different; they would rather share personal spiritual failures and value more members of the body that support each other in weakness. And once they have overcome the difficulties of learning abstractive literary knowledge, they display high enthusiasm for theological studies. Compared to the previous generation, they have more opportunities to embody the true meaning of fellowship, and are even more likely to establish denominational church systems.

**Dimension V: The Explosion of Mass Information and Globalization in Post-Modern Society Changes Young People's Cultural Communication Methods.**

***Transitioning from an Authoritative Model—from Instructing to Inspiring:*** With the ever innovative and ubiquitous information technology, today's young people have many ways to obtain information and to create information economies that are autonomous, fast, convenient and cheap. This has subverted the instructive authoritative models of modern society and has created the more inspirational models for post-modern society.

***Internet Freedom—Not Entirely Virtual:*** This new generation of Chinese young people display characteristics of boldness, freedom and openness in both speech and style on the internet and in the social media. This reflects their rebelliousness towards China's autocracy and authoritative society which confines public opinions. Since they can express themselves and obtain information more freely, the Internet world is not entirely virtual to Chinese young people; rather, it is very real.

***Pop Culture Enchantment—the Element of Beauty:*** Pop culture mirrors the quest for beauty of this generation's young people, which is so-called "Beauty Is Power." Products or information that lack exquisite packaging or a rich sense of design may be considered cheap, and therefore are dismissed easily. Church promotional information and activities likewise need to value aesthetics; after all, God is the source and ultimate creator of all things that are beautiful.

***The Call of Pop Culture—Be Yourself:*** Pop culture also reflects this new generation's quest for self-style, that is "Dare to Be Yourself." Singers, authors, actors and artists, who have courageously realized their personal identity and have not caved under social pressures, become heroes and idols in these post-modern young peoples' hearts. To them, the self has become the most serious philosophical issue, yet caring for oneself, exploring oneself, or seeking self-actualization are not to be equated with selfishness. This new generation cares not only about his/her own self-actualization but also about that of others, and they believe that helping one another to achieve such goals has moral value. Therefore, when someone, who once was unknown to the public, blockbusters the stage of talent shows, the entire stadium could cheer for him or her with tears.

***The Transitions of Cultural Communication Modes:*** Information technology combined with pop culture drives further innovations of cultural communication modes, and even shapes the worldviews of young people. Pop culture like pop music, micro-film, animation and so on are widespread among young people through information software, global networks and social media much more than through traditional media like cable TV, CDs and DVDs. Information dissemination focuses more on the inspirational rather than authoritative aspects, and it also tends to be rapid, recreational, and fragmented. The acceptance and management of information tends to be visual with emphasis on intuition and a lower application given to literature and rationality. Young people are more used to accessing the Internet with smartphones or tablets, and while they can manage multiple forms of information simultaneously, their attention spans are much shorter.

***Reason, Meaning and the Limits of Internet Obsession/Addiction:*** Some of this generation indulges themselves with Internet and cellphones, not because they enjoy these things, but rather as a doorway they wish to find to free expression and free information and to explore self-value as well as self-positioning when facing the realities of pessimism, disappointment and helplessness. From the information they shared online, we can tell that they long in their hearts for sincere personal contacts, but in reality their social circles are too narrow and lack sincerity. While the Internet has made interpersonal communications easier, the limitation of the Internet is that it cannot truly solve the distance and loneliness caused by the lack of direct and face-to-face contact between people.

***The Limitations and Breakthroughs of Internet Ministry:*** Internet addiction itself makes them an easier prey to the temptations of immoral behavior, such as internet porn and unhealthy business activities, such as internet fraud. Although internet ministry may provide faith consoling, the ministry itself cannot effectively touch their inner lives and souls. Empathetically acknowledging their spiritual needs and helping them build up life connections to learn about themselves in true love and to learn about the society in truth, is what can effectively help them enter into faith and experience transformation and growth. Internet technology only provides a technological platform, but making life connections to share their joys and sorrows and the experience of walking alongside them are the keys to winning this generation.

**Dimension VI: The North American Educational Environment Attracts Affluent Chinese Students. Overall, the Majority Are From the Middle Class and Above.**

***The Overall Economic Status of Chinese Students in America:*** The majority of undergraduate and graduate students of the post 85/90 generation are self-supporting for tuition and the costs of living. This is different from the previous generation who came to study in the late 1990s; their tuition was mostly dependent on applying for scholarships, and they had to work for their living expenses. This forms a stark contrast between these two generations of international students. Overall, most current students come from affluent families.

***The Impact on Campus Ministry:*** Today's standard of living and consumption among Chinese undergraduate and graduate students are much higher than the previous generation, which not only draws the attention of the campus ministry staff, but it also affects the traditional campus ministry model. Meals after church, outreach, open-house dinners, retreat sites, transportation and so on need to be re-evaluated, either to improve the quality or change the forms to meet their needs and expectations.

***Non-Only-Children among Chinese Students in America:*** Based on our observation (yet to be confirmed with statistics), among these post 85/90 generation Chinese students in North America, there is a higher percentage of non-only-children than their peers in mainland cities. Many have siblings who are 6 to 12 years younger (yet to be confirmed by research), yet because of the age gap and the differences in parenting, they could still possess the dual personality of only children, being independent and dependent at the same time.

***Motivations for Studying in North America:*** This generation's motivations for studying in North America are extremely complex; either it is 1) per their parents' request because they believe their child will have a better chance for career advancement when their child returns to China after their studies; or 2) per their parents' request for the sake of inheriting the family business; or 3) per their parents' request to avoid the highly competitive educational environment in China; or 4) out of obedience to their parents' wish to achieve immigration status so that the entire family may immigrate in the future; or 5) they are self-motivated to study abroad to broaden their horizons, especially to absorb social values such as equality, liberty and freedom from western culture; or 6) they are influenced by a herd mentality, which happens when people around them advocate for studying abroad, which increased both their parents' and their own interest; or 7) their parents despair of national development and thus hope for their children to attempt overseas development; or 8) through a school's exchange student program, which pays for their tuition and affords them the opportunity to obtain both domestic and international university degrees. It has been observed that the majority of those who are able to study abroad also hope to remain abroad or obtain certain levels of achievement before their return. Rarely had someone who came abroad to study for purely academic reasons returned to China right after their graduation.

***Economic Disparity Among Chinese International Students:*** It is a myth to believe that all post 85/90s generation students studying in North America are from rich families. Families from the middle class and above who are willing to invest considerable funds to pay for their children's tuition and living expenses are not the same as being wealthy. Whether to find a job or return to China, once they've completed their studies these students would have to shoulder considerable financial burdens. These students may not identify themselves as coming from wealthy families, so campus ministry workers need to pay attention to avoid labeling them as "Fuerdai."<sup>1</sup> True Fuerdai and "Guanerdai"<sup>2</sup> have

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<sup>1</sup> Fuerdai is a term which describes the sons and daughters of the Chinese nouveau riche in China's reform era.

<sup>2</sup> Guanerdai is a term which describes the sons and daughters of Chinese government officials.

no financial obligations. Upon finishing their degrees, they have many means to obtain a different status to remain in North America or to transit to other countries.

***The Consequences of Falsified Application Materials:*** Since many among this new generation of Chinese students in North America came abroad to study at their parents' request, a large number falsified letters of recommendation and grade reports when they applied for admission. Consequently, many who have a well-developed conscience experience a lot of painful inner struggles, emotional distress and low self-image.

***Differences from their Peers in China:*** As a whole, although the nationwide inclination to study abroad is ever enduring, only the minority is able to succeed. In one sense, they belong to the elite group and this naturally shapes their consciousness to feel distinct from those who never had the opportunity. While living abroad, they also would rather hang out with other Chinese students and build up their own community and community culture, such as participating in Chinese students and scholar associations (CSSA) and so on. The Post 85/90 generation in North America is indeed different than their peers who have remained behind in China. The differences in terms of the socio-economic status of their Family-Of-Origin, in addition to their weathered experiences of study and living abroad, are all gradually enlarging the internal cultural gap among this age group. Also, transitioning from studying abroad to returning home deepens this gap.

***Dual Traits and Impact of the North American Social Environment:*** For Chinese students, the liberty and freedom of speech they experience in North America are the most shocking experiences they've ever had to the point of reshaping their entire worldviews. However, the violence and pornography flooding the media, the Internet and the video games in North America, can bring about a negative impact on them.

### **Interdisciplinary Applications and the Limitations of this Dimensional Analysis**

***Intergenerational Differences Reflect An Era Divide:*** From this six-dimensional analysis, we have observed the overall temperament and characteristics of the post 85/90 generation, who have their own unique historical, social, economic and cultural background. The differences between them and the previous generation may not be completely explained by a generational gap, but rather it should be analyzed from the perspective of a cultural gap. In other words, the cultural differences from the former generation will not easily change or go away even after the younger generation ages.

***Individual Cases under the Guidelines of Common Traits:*** This analysis of the characteristics of the Chinese post-85/90-generation students utilized multi-dimensional perspectives because the relevant elements are indeed highly complex. Yet when it comes to concrete individual implementation, it is safe to say that every student has his or her own life story. We should not understand them with stereotypes, hasty generalizations or prejudices. However, these six dimensions can provide a basic framework for our understanding, and if accompanied with listening, caring and dialoguing, hopefully we can understand each individual student's inner world faster.

***Case Studies and Applications from Specific to General:*** Each of these six dimensions may have radiation effects and interaction effects in all areas of one student's life, so they can be utilized as tools for interdisciplinary analysis. For instance: there is a student who came to study in North America two years ago who is completely addicted to internet social media. He spends every day after school on online games with his high school friends in China. He cannot take care of his basic needs and he is unable to keep up his grades. When we apply this six dimensional analysis, we can find clues to help us understand this student's situation and gradually find an entry point and a method to care for him and help him.

***Guidance from God and the Work of the Holy Spirit:*** Lastly, we wish to restate the limitation of this six-dimensional analysis. The development of every ministry cannot be separated from God's guidance and the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, those who serve this post-85/90 generation ought to pay attention and be obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit to apply these six dimensions with flexibility so that we might deepen our understanding of individual differences in order to effectively lead them to the Gospel and to help them obtain answers as well as effective plans for their individual lives and social problems.

We welcome your support for our training ministry; please contact Ambassadors For Christ, Inc. Tel: 717-687-8564, Email: [afc@afcinc.org](mailto:afc@afcinc.org)